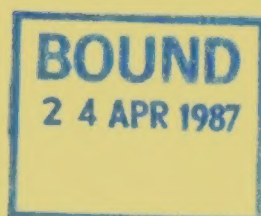




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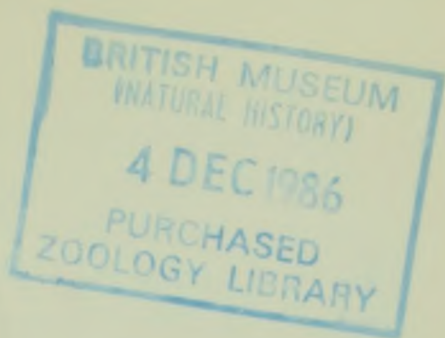
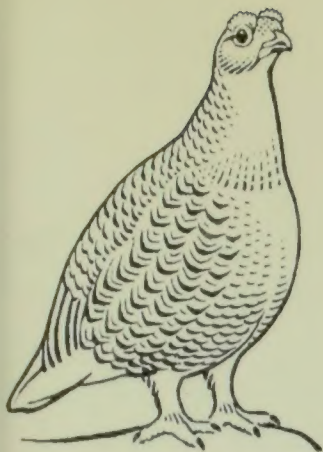












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**1986**

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Volume 79

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(1) every significant mention of each species, not only in titles, but also within the text of papers, notes and letters, including all those appearing in such lists as the 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 1985', but excluding those in 'Recent reports', 'News and comment', requests and reviews;

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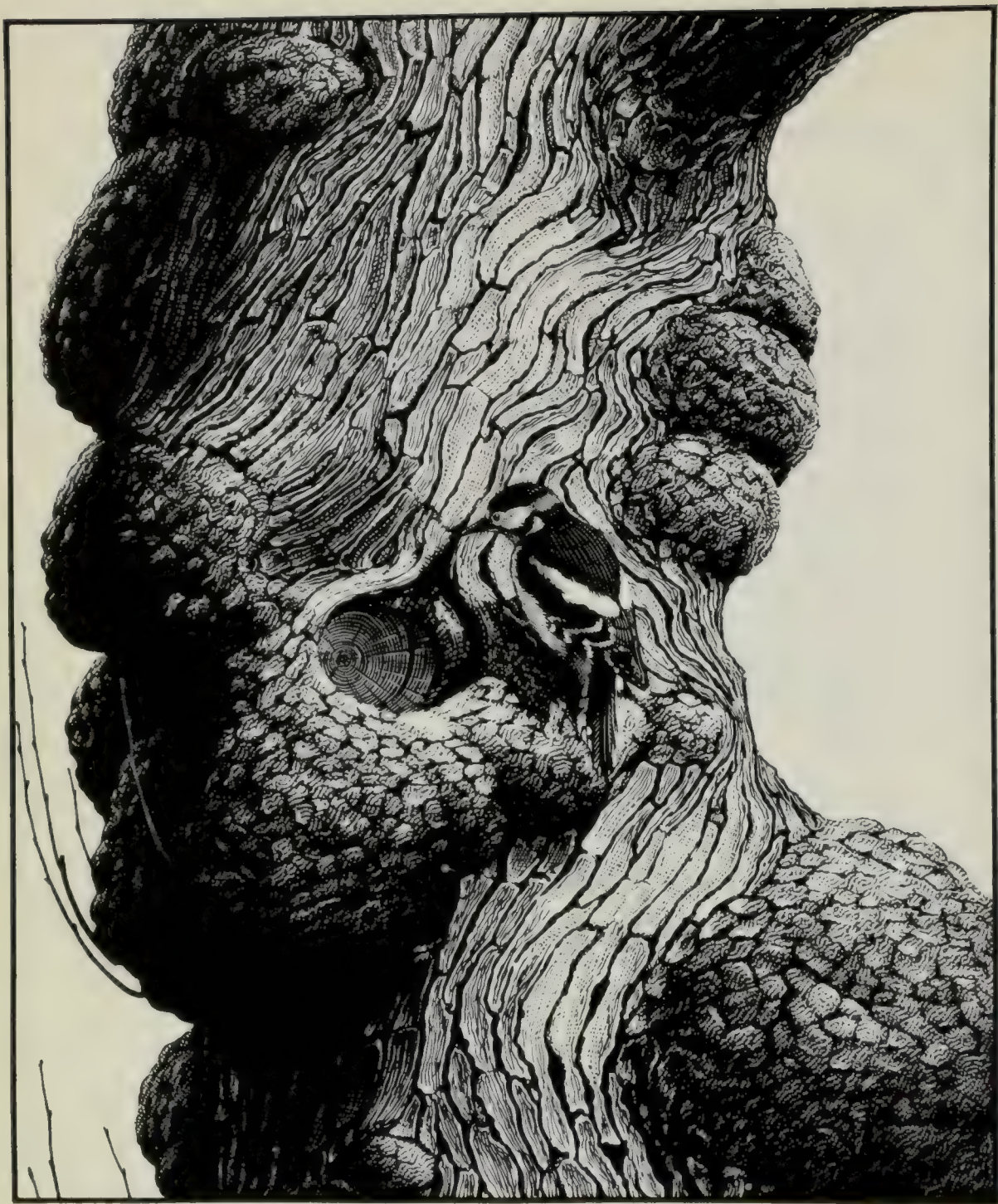


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186	Oriental Skylark ( <i>Killian Mullarney</i> )	609	Semipalmated Sandpiper ( <i>D. I. M. Wallace</i> )
215	Red-breasted Goose and Brent Geese ( <i>Bryan Bland</i> )	670	Red-breasted Flycatcher ( <i>M. Parker</i> ); Yellow-browed Warbler ( <i>D. Nurney</i> )
216	Ivory Gull ( <i>Simon Smethurst</i> ); Forster's Tern; Laughing Gull ( <i>Julian R. Hough</i> )	671	Siskins ( <i>Bryan Bland</i> ); Ortolan Bunting ( <i>D. Nurney</i> )
217	Long-billed Dowitcher ( <i>R. Woodley</i> )	672	Brent Geese ( <i>D. A. Thelwell</i> )
218	Waxwings ( <i>Simon Smethurst</i> )	675	Baillon's Crake ( <i>Terry Box</i> )
221	White-crowned Black Wheatear ( <i>B. J. Brown</i> )		
228	Snowy Owl ( <i>Martin Hallam</i> )		
263	Waxwings ( <i>Bryan Bland</i> )		
267	Snow Bunting ( <i>Alan Harris</i> ); Dipper ( <i>D. Nurney</i> )		
277	Song Thrush ( <i>Martin W. Woodcock</i> )		
311	Serin ( <i>Ernest Leahy</i> ); Bonaparte's Gull ( <i>Julian R. Hough</i> )		





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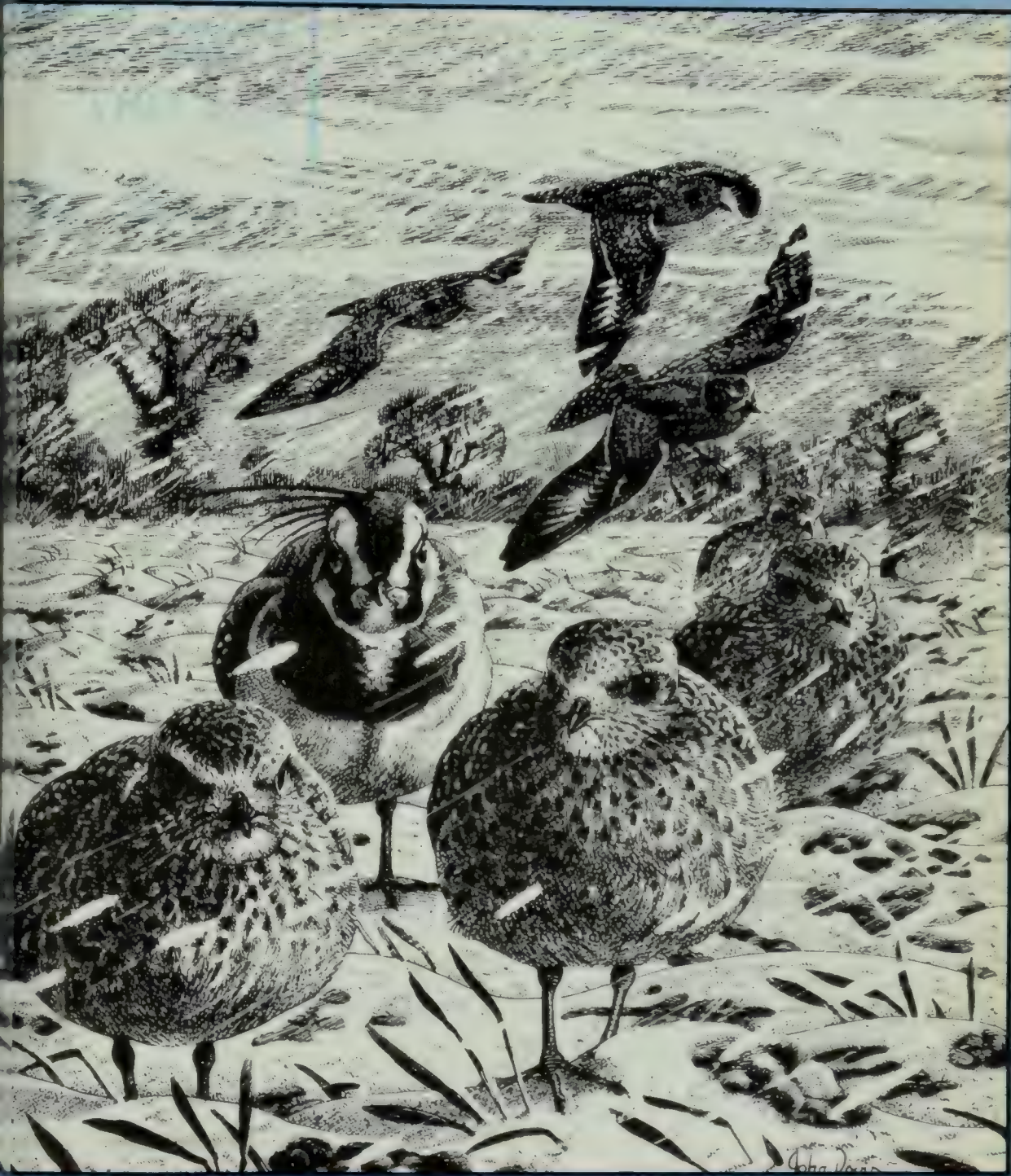
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# British Birds

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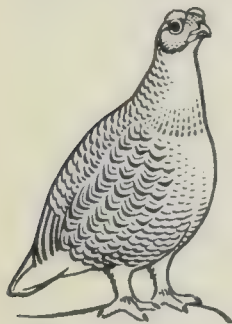
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*Publishing Manager,  
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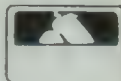
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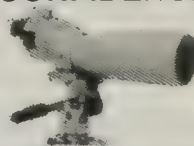
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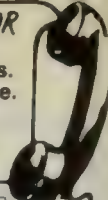
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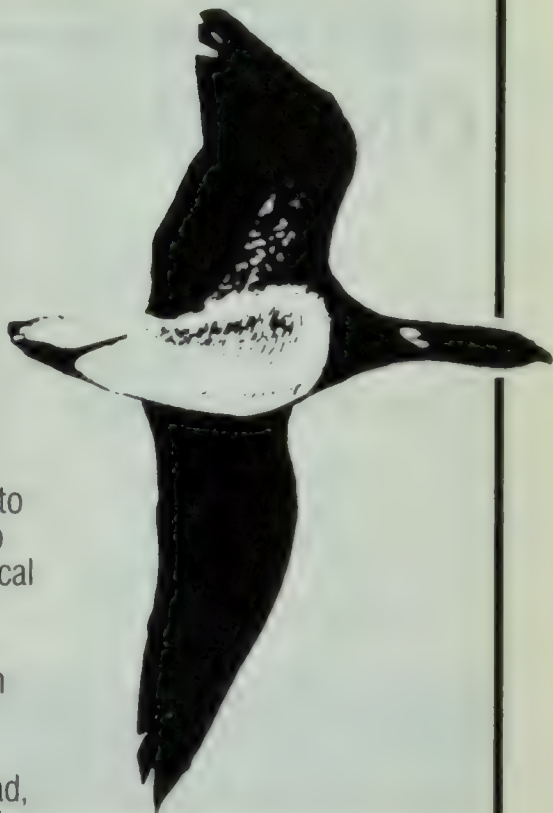
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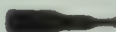
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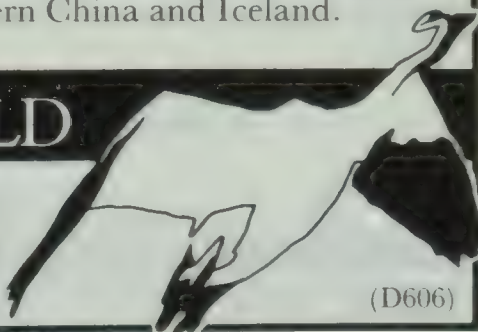
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# British Birds

VOLUME 79 NUMBER 1 JANUARY 1986



## Recent reports

October 1985 was the best-ever month for observations of rare birds in Britain and Ireland. In recognition of this, we have placed our regular feature 'Recent reports' at the front of this issue instead of in its traditional position towards the back.

*Ian Dawson and Keith Allsopp*

The dates in this report refer to October unless otherwise stated.

The month began with unsettled westerly weather as a series of depressions moved across the Atlantic and into Europe. After 12th, an anticyclone developed, deflecting the depressions to the north and bringing

some fine settled weather. The centre of pressure moved towards the north of England after 21st, and strong easterly winds developed for a few days, until a further move by the anticyclone to the west brought in rather colder northerly air.



**These are largely unchecked reports, not authenticated records**

**Seabirds**

There were still small numbers of **Sooty Shearwaters** *Puffinus griseus* in the North Sea through the month, and a late **Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris diomedea* off North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 17th. Unusual inland were a juvenile **Gannet** *Sula bassana* at Thrybergh Reservoir (South Yorkshire) on 5th, a **Great**

**Skua** *Stercorarius skua* at the same locality on 2nd, and juvenile **Pomarine Skuas** *S. pomarinus* at Staines Reservoir (Surrey) on 5th and 6th (plates 1 & 2), and Thrybergh again on 13th. The second half of the month saw this species moving down the Scottish and English east coasts in numbers unprecedented in recent years, with 50 in Orkney,



**1 & 2.** Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*, Surrey, October 1985 (above, *Rupert B. Hastings*; below, *Andrew V. Moon*)



200 in Lothian, including 54 past Barns Ness on 31st, 67 past Whitburn (Tyne & Wear) and 60 past Cley (Norfolk) on 29th, and 61 off St Mary's Island (Tyne & Wear) in 1½ hours on 31st. A handful of **Long-tailed Skuas** *S. longicaudus* included a late report of a juvenile at Staines on 7th September (plates 3 & 4), and an adult and immature together on 16th at Dowsing Light Vessel in the North Sea. This light also attracted two immature **Sabine's Gulls** *Larus sabini* on 15th, while others were seen at Hengistbury Head (Dorset) on 3rd and Torcross (Devon) on 13th. The first two **Iceland Gulls** *L. glaucoideus* appeared during the month in Orkney, and 170 **Little Gulls** *L. minutus* passed Filey Brigg (North Yorkshire) on 19th. **Ring-billed Gulls** *L. delawarensis* continue to turn up at Blackpill (West Glamorgan), with two there on 5th, and others were identified at Gibraltar Point (Lincolnshire) on 28th September, and at Slapton Ley (Devon), an adult, on 22nd and 23rd. Perhaps surprisingly, in view of the American landbirds to make the Atlantic crossing, the only other American seabird to reach our shores was a **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* at Musselburgh (Lothian) from 6th to 19th, and again at Granton (Lothian) on 19th and 31st. A late report from Scotland concerned a **Caspian Tern** *S. caspia* heading north at Anstruther (Fife) on 8th September, and the only other unusual tern was a juvenile **White-winged Black** *Chlidonias leucopterus* at Craigavon (Co. Armagh) on

16th. Small numbers of **Little Auks** *Alle alle* were regular on the British east coast late in the month, though there were two early ones off Cape Clear Island (Co. Cork) on 10th.

### Wildfowl

Seven small **Canada Geese** *Branta canadensis* appeared in north Donegal around 14th and had moved to Lough Foyle (Co. Londonderry) on 21st. Other presumed transatlantic arrivals were a female/immature **American Wigeon** *Anas americana* on St Agnes (Scilly), a **Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* on Tresco (Scilly) from about 14th, and a **Surf Scoter** *Melanitta perspicillata*, also immature, at Cape Clear Island on 9th. A **Garganey** *Anas querquedula* on Tresco around 16th was almost as unusual. A duck and two drake **Red-crested Pochards** *Netta rufina* were at Grafham Water (Cambridgeshire) and moved to Little Paxton (Cambridgeshire) late in the month, while a single drake appeared at Wraysbury (Berkshire) on 26th.



3 & 4. Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*, Surrey, September 1985 (Peter Gasson)







5 & 6. Juvenile Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, Cornwall, October 1985  
(Graham Sutton)



A mass of 16,000 **Pink-footed Geese** *Anser brachyrhynchus* at Loch of Strathbeg (Grampian) newly arrived from Iceland on 30th September must have been a fine sight and sound, whilst, in the extreme southeast, Sandwich (Kent) had an 'unprecedented series of records' so early of **Whooper Swans** *Cygnus cygnus*, albeit a total of eight birds on five dates.

### Wading birds

A bittern flushed by a farmer near Tacumshin (Co. Wexford) may yet prove to be **American Bittern** *Botaurus lentiginosus*, while from the other direction (?) came an immature **Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* which arrived on St Mary's (Scilly) on 11th and was still present on 20th (plates 32 & 33), and an adult seen flying over the same island on 13th. A **Great White Egret** *Egretta alba* graced Minsmere (Suffolk) for the second successive autumn, from 5th to 20th, while Walney Island (Cumbria) played host to an adult and a juvenile **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* on 25th, the adult departing the same day to the west, but the juvenile remaining into November (plate 7): this latter was the Carlisle bird of September which had been taken into care and subsequently released on 24th—quite unbelievable that it should find the company of one of its kind, if only for a day. Most spectacular sight of the month must have been the 71 **Cranes** *Grus grus* over Dungeness (Kent) around 26th; another was at Caerlaverock (Dumfries & Galloway) on at least 11th.

The high numbers of **Curlew Sandpipers** *Calidris ferruginea* this autumn continued into October, with 110 at Tacumshin on 5th especially notable for Ireland. Late **Dotterels** *Charadrius morinellus* occurred at Sandwich, Cape Clear Island and Scilly, as did a **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* at Cley from 5th to 19th, and **Temminck's Stints** *Calidris temminckii* at Nottingham on 2nd and Upton Warren (Hereford & Worcester) on 23rd, while at the month end a **Sociable Plover** *Chettusia gregaria* was in the Sompting area (West Sussex). From the west came **Lesser Golden Plovers** *Pluvialis dominica* to Sennen (Cornwall), St Mary's from 7th to about 16th, and Winkleigh (Devon) on 13th. Two **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** *Tryngites subruficollis*, a **Semipalmated Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla* and a **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* remained into early October at Tacumshin, this last being joined



7. Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Cumbria, October 1985 (Steve Young)

on 1st and 2nd by one of the autumn's prize birds, a juvenile **Short-billed Dowitcher** *L. griseus*. Tacumshin flooded on 7th, losing most of its attraction for waders, but still pulled in a **Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* on 27th, surprisingly scarce this autumn. Further **Long-billed Dowitchers** were at Heybridge (Essex) early in the month, Slimbridge (Gloucestershire) from 5th to 9th, Davidstow (Cornwall) on 21st (plates 5 & 6) and at Alton Water (Suffolk) from 20th into November, while one at Minsmere on 30th may have been this last individual. A spotted







8 & 9. American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*, Co. Cork, October 1985 (Richard T. Mills)



adult **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularia* was one of several attractions on Tresco, and a juvenile was at Holme (Norfolk) on 7th. Single **Wilson's Phalaropes** *Phalaropus tricolor* stayed for a few days mid month at Chew (Avon) and Landulph Marsh (Cornwall) from 4th to 6th, and Ireland's only **White-rumped Sandpiper** *C. fuscicollis* of the year was on Lough Foyle on 21st.

A late **Corncrake** *Crex crex* was watched on North Ronaldsay on 13th, being chased out

to sea by a Raven *Corvus corax*, and several more were seen by the birders thronging Scilly. It is astonishing the distance that crakes and rails can fly when needs must: there have been several recent **Soras** *Porzana carolina*, but none can have been as obliging or smart as the bright-yellow-billed and black-masked individual at Pagham Lagoon (West Sussex) from about 25th into November (plates 30 & 31).



10 & 11. Philadelphia Vireo *Vireo philadelphicus*, Co. Cork, October 1985  
(Richard T. Mills)

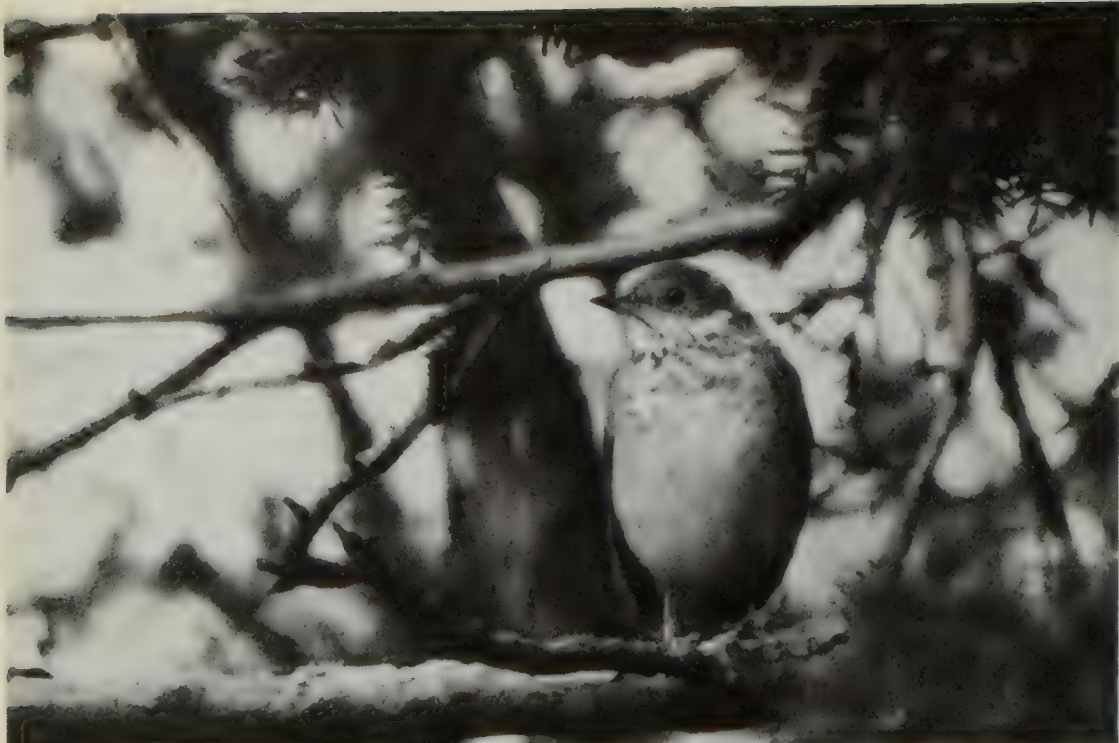


ous species was **Red-eyed Vireo** *Vireo olivaceus* with one on St Agnes from 3rd, at least two on St Mary's, one staying until 20th (plate 14), two at Porthgwarra (Cornwall) on 5th, with one still on 6th, one on Lundy (Devon) on 5th, one or two at St Just (Cornwall), one on Cape Clear Island from 30th September to 7th, a different individual there on 20th, and one at Wick (Highland) from 13th to at least 17th. Another, reported from Galley Head (Co. Cork) on 6th, was reidentified on 13th as Britain and Ireland's first **Philadelphia Vireo** *V. philadelphicus*, staying until 16th (plates 10 & 11). The incredulous birders who realised its true identity found a first-year male **American Redstart** *Setophaga ruticilla* only a few metres away, this remaining until 15th (plates 8 & 9). Meanwhile, the **Northern Parula** *Parula americana* found at Hengistbury Head on 30th September stayed until 12th, a superb long-stayer arrived on St Mary's on 3rd (plates 15-18), moving to St Agnes from 18th, and a female reached Penlee Point near Rame Head (Cornwall) from 17th to 19th. This locality had already provided another potential addition to the British and Irish list on 13th, an adult male **Wilson's Warbler** *Wilsonia pusilla*, most frustratingly almost the only day-tripper from North America. Amazingly, a third species of American warbler may have turned up near Rame, for there were rumours that a **Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas* was heard and

### The Scilly season . . . from points west

'This October is bound to be a duff one on Scilly': such is the feeling every autumn, and yet each October seems to surpass the one before. This month was the best-ever single month for American landbirds in Britain and Ireland, both in quantity and quality, yet the prize gems missed Scilly. The most numer-



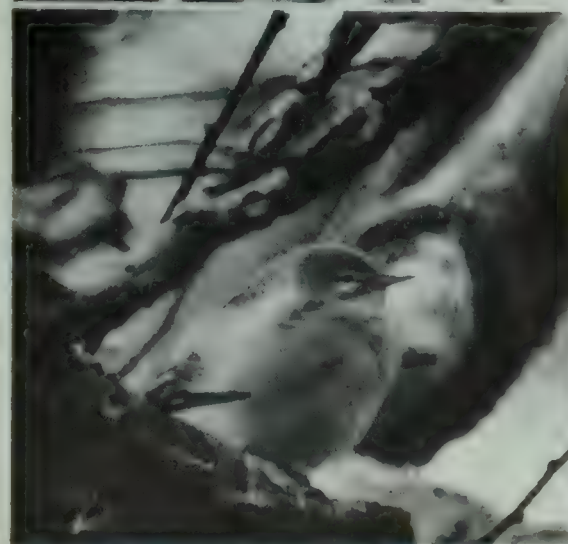


12 & 13. Gray-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus*, Cornwall, October 1985 (S. C. Hutchings)



14. Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*, Scilly, October 1985 (P. Wheeler)





15-18. Northern Parula *Parula americana*, Scilly, October 1985 (top, David Tipling; above left and right, John Hewitt; below, S. C. Hutchings)







glimpsed on 26th. The long expected **Yellow-rumped Warbler** *Dendroica coronata* at last reappeared on Scilly, a most obliging bird on St Mary's from 7th to late in the month (plates 21 & 22), with a second there briefly on 10th, and another on Cape Clear Island from 5th to 7th. **Blackpoll Warblers** *D. striata* were surprisingly absent from Scilly, the only reports being from Whalsay (Shetland) at the start of the month, and at Hook Head (Co. Wexford) from 5th to 10th. Meanwhile, back to Scilly for a **Bobolink** *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* from about 9th to at least 21st, and a dazzling immature male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** *Pheucticus ludovicianus* at the same time (plate 19); a female, dropped by a Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* near Tacumshin, recovered well after veterinary

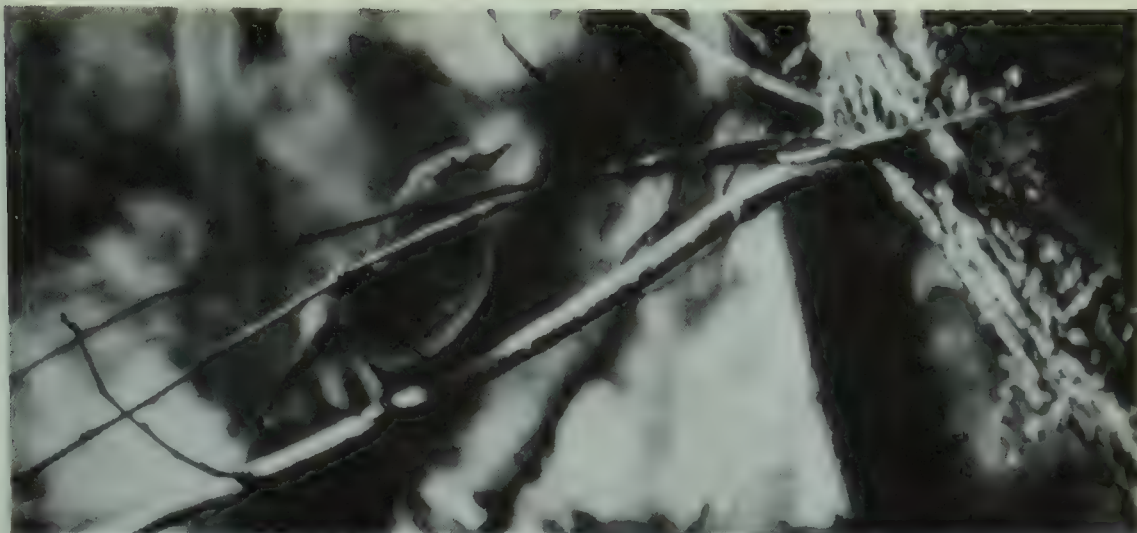
attention, only to drop dead four days later; a third was ringed on Lundy on 27th. **Indigo Bunting** *Passerina cyanea* is currently in category D of the British and Irish list, but its claims to be upgraded to full category A status must be strong following the capture in a mist-net on 11th of an immature on Cape Clear Island, previously glimpsed on 9th and subsequently on 20th, skulking impossibly in dense bracken. A **Common Nighthawk** *Chordeiles minor* was picked up exhausted on the Wirral (Merseyside) on 11th, and after recuperation was flown to Belize in South America. Back on Scilly, there was a surfeit of cuckoos: an extremely active **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** *Coccyzus americanus* was found on St



19. Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*, Scilly, October 1985 (John Hewitt)

20. Part of 'the Black-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus erythrophthalmus* twitch', Scilly, October 1985 (David Tipling)





21 & 22. Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata*, Scilly, October 1985 (John Hewitt)

Mary's on 12th (plate 23), to be followed a few hours later by a moribund **Black-billed Cuckoo** *C. erythrophthalmus* which was much-watched (plate 20), but is presumed to have died overnight. The **Yellow-billed Cuckoo**, however, or another, was seen on Tresco on 13th, St Mary's again through to at least 21st, St Agnes on 19th and St Martin's on 20th: it seems likely that at least two and possibly three or even four birds were involved. Further Yellow-billed Cuckoos occurred on The Lizard (Cornwall), and at Weybridge (Surrey), knocked out at a window about 17th and released a couple of days later. A **Gray-cheeked Thrush** *Catharus minimus* was trapped on Lundy on 11th, and there was another at Hayle (Cornwall) at the end of the month (plates 12 & 13). Sadly, an **Ovenbird** *Seiurus aurocapillus* was picked up freshly dead at Plymouth (Devon) on 22nd, the second fresh corpse out of three records. Finally, back to Ireland, where an immature/female **Scarlet Tanager** *Piranga olivacea* was at Firkeel (Co. Cork) from 12th to 14th, to be followed by a male in the same bush on 18th: yet another amazing coincidence in an amazing autumn.

### ... and from points east and south

**Yellow-browed Warblers** *Phylloscopus inornatus* flooded in in three figures, including ten in Orkney, 20 in Lincolnshire, 11 through Sandwich, seven on the Sussex coast, 25 on Cape Clear Island, a single-day maximum of 22 on Scilly on 13th, and, inland, Leicester-shire's first in a Melton Mowbray garden on 31st. In the light of these numbers, **Pallas's**



23. Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus*, Scilly, October 1985 (John Hewitt)





24. Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*, Dorset, October 1985 (Tony Croucher)

**Warblers** *P. proregulus* were few, with about half a dozen on the English east coast from 20th, five or six in Scilly, and, perhaps surprisingly, three in Ireland: on Cape Clear Island on 21st, on Sherkin Island (Co. Cork) from 23rd to 27th, and on Hook Head on 24th and 25th; the only previous Irish record was on Cape Clear Island way back in 1968. There was an early **Radde's Warbler** *P. schwarzi* at Helvick Head (Co. Waterford) on 15th, a most obliging individual on Tresco from 18th to 20th, another on Gugh (Scilly) about 23rd, one at Wells (Norfolk) from 21st to 24th, and a fifth at Sennen on 27th. In contrast, there were just two **Dusky**

**Warblers** *P. fuscatus*, on St Mary's on 19th and at St Just on 27th. **Arctic Warblers** *P. borealis* were on Lundy on 23rd September, at Hengistbury Head from 30th September to 1st, at St Just to 3rd, and on Toe Head (Co. Cork) from 21st to 24th, while **Greenish Warblers** *P. trochiloides* were on Cape Clear Island on 29th and 30th September, and at Hengistbury from 1st to 3rd (plate 24), and another unringed one there on 8th.

Good numbers of **Richard's Pipits** *Anthus novaeseelandiae* included five at Porthgwarra on 27th, on which date there were also single **Tawny Pipit** *A. campestris*, **Red-throated Pipit** *A. cervinus* and **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* there. An **Olive-backed Pipit** *A. hodgsoni* occurred on Tresco in the third week, and another **Citrine Wagtail** was at Musselburgh from 10th to 12th. **Stonechats** *Saxicola torquata* of one of the Siberian races *maura/stejnegeri* were at Nanquidno (Cornwall) to at least 3rd, on St Mary's from 13th, at Filey from 18th to 21st, and at Spurn on 22nd, while **Lesser White-throats** *Sylvia curruca* of the Siberian race *blythi* were trapped at Sandwich on 21st and 23rd, and at Spurn on 24th. The real Siberian stars, however, were an adult male **Brown Shrike** *Lanius cristatus* at Sumburgh (Shetland) from 30th September to 2nd (yet another first), a **White's Thrush** *Zoothera dauma* on Shetland on 10th, an **Eye-browed Thrush** *Turdus obscurus* at Hook Head on 16th, and an immature/female **Siberian Thrush** *Z. sibirica* on Cape Clear Island on 18th.





25 & 26. Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata*, Scilly, October 1985 (above, P. Wheeler; right, John Hewitt)

A **Booted Warbler** *Hippolais caligata* appeared on St Mary's from 15th to 19th (plates 25 & 26) followed by another **Olivaceous Warbler** *H. pallida* there around 23rd for a few days, as last year. After a blank year on Scilly in 1984, juvenile **Rose-coloured Starlings** *Sturnus roseus* turned up on Bryher around 9th and two on St Mary's on 13th, but none stayed. Both **Rustic** *Emberiza rustica* and **Little Buntings** *E. pusilla* were on Fair Isle (Shetland) on 9th, followed by at least four Rustic and three Little on Scilly, with further Little Buntings at Hengistbury Head on 14th and in Mourier Valley, Jersey (Channel Islands) on 27th. A **Parrot Crossbill** *Loxia pytyopsittacus* was picked up dead at Holm (Orkney) on 27th. It has been a long wait since the big **Nut-cracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* invasion of 1968, but, after large numbers passing through southern Scandinavia and reaching Belgium and the Netherlands, one was surprised at Northward Hill (Kent) on 25th, to be followed at the start of November by a ridiculously tame and obliging individual near Westleton (Suffolk), destined not only



to be a television star, but also perhaps the most photographed bird ever?

At least four **Short-toed Larks** *Calandrella brachydactyla* were on Scilly through the month, with another at Portland (Dorset) from 7th, astonishingly, the first record for that locality, which has been thoroughly combed during every migration season for





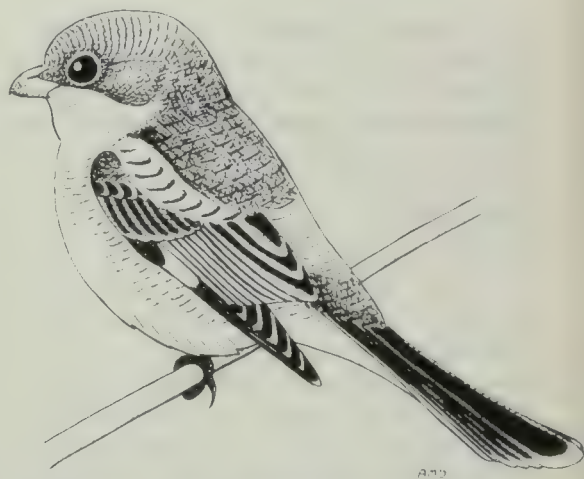
27. Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*, Scilly, October 1985 (P. Wheeler)

over 30 years. The juvenile **Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* which arrived on Bryher in September remained through October, latterly on Tresco (plate 27), while others were on Cape Clear Island on 29th and 30th September, and at St Ives (Cornwall) on 5th. **Icterine Warblers** *Hippolais icterina* were very scarce, as were **Melodious** *H. polyglotta*, though there were four on Cape Clear Island between 8th and 13th. The 'resident' Isle of May (Fife) **Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* remained to at least 5th, and a male appeared at Old Head of Kinsale (Co. Cork) on 13th. A superb male **Sardinian Warbler** *S. melanocephala* was on St Mary's for a couple of days around 23rd. A juvenile **Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* was on Tresco from 9th to at least 21st, a male **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* near Padstow (Cornwall) from 7th to 11th, and **Serins** *Serinus serinus* at Prawle (Devon) on 13th and Hook Head on 15th.

#### Scarce migrants and winter visitors

**Scarlet Rosefinches** *Carpodacus erythrinus* occurred early in the month at St Ives, on Lundy, and on South Ronaldsay (Orkney), as well as several in Scilly, while there were late **Bluethroats** *Luscinia svecica* on Gugh on 12th, at Clevedon (Avon) on 19th and Sandwich on 21st. Small numbers of **Wrynecks** *Jynx torquilla* included two inland in Bedfordshire, at Sandy on 11th and Mepper-

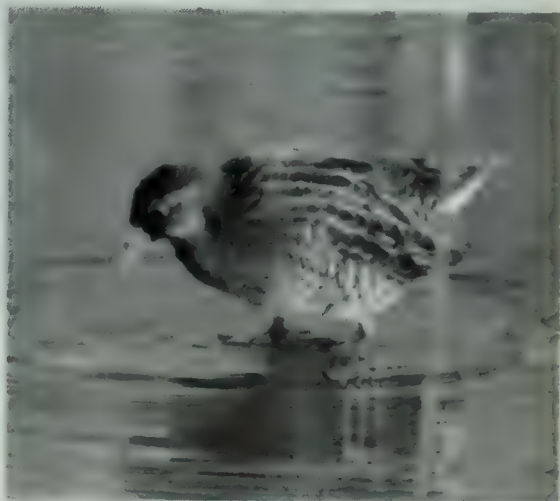
shall on 15th. Papa Westray (Orkney) had a late **Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria* on 20th. A good number of **Red-breasted Flycatchers** *Ficedula parva* included five in Ireland.



A **Shore Lark** *Eremophila alpestris* at Barn Elms Reservoir (Greater London) stayed from 29th September to 8th (plates 28 & 29), and a **Dartford Warbler** *S. undata* at Portland on 4th was also unusual. Orkney had its first **Treecreepers** *Certhia familiaris* for four years, on North Ronaldsay from 4th to 9th and on Birsay on 6th, a vagrant **Blue Tit** *Parus caeruleus* on South Ronaldsay on 21st and 22nd, and its first **Coal Tits** *P. ater* since 1949, with one on North Ronaldsay



28 & 29. Shore Lark *Eremophila alpestris*, Greater London, September/October 1985 (Andrew V. Moon)



30 & 31. Sora *Porzana carolina*, West Sussex, October 1985 (Tony Croucher)







**32 & 33.** Immature Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Scilly, October 1985 (above, John Hewitt; right, P. Wheeler)

from 5th to 7th and two at Holm from 7th to 8th. Interestingly, Walney noted an 'abnormal influx mid October' of this last species. A **Crested Tit** *P. cristatus* at St Ouen, Jersey, on 21st was a first for the island. Forty **Bearded Tits** *Panurus biarmicus* at Hengistbury from 17th to 19th was the largest group reported of good numbers of this eruptive species.

A **Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* on Cape Clear Island on 20th was only the second record there, and others were unusual visitors to Lundy on 19th and to St Mary's from 19th to at least 21st. A large northward movement of finches took place at Sandwich on 18th, with 830 **Redpolls** *Carduelis flammea*, 870 **Chaffinches** *Fringilla coelebs*, 400 **Linnetts** *C. cannabina*, 3,700 **Goldfinches** *C. carduelis* (an Observatory record), and 420 **Siskins** *C. spinus*, together with over 1,000 **Swallows** *Hirundo rustica* and 415 **Pied Wagtails** *Motacilla alba*, part of an 'unprecedented passage' of the last species there. Large numbers of Siskins were reported generally, and 'hundreds' of **Crossbills** *Loxia curvirostra* were in Greystoke Forest and the Eden Valley (Cumbria). 'Exceptional numbers' of **Bramblings** *F. montifringilla* passed



over Thrybergh, and 1,300 flew south through Snettisham (Norfolk) on 12th; a party of nine could even be seen from the editorial office at Blunham (Bedfordshire) on 24th. Farther north, a flock of 45 **Linnetts** on 9th was a Fair Isle record. **Redwings** *Turdus iliacus* arrived in force in mid month, with 3,000 at the light on 17th at Dowsing Light Vessel, and over 1,000 at Sandwich on 19th.

### Birds of prey

There were late **Red-footed Falcons** *Falco vespertinus* at Bolberry Down (Devon) on 21st and 22nd, and Abberton Reservoir (Essex) on 31st, a **Hobby** *F. subbuteo* on Walney to 27th, and a juvenile **Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus* at Horsey (Norfolk) on 22nd. Five migrant **Sparrowhawks** were seen at Dowsing Light between 13th and 20th, and **Rough-legged Buzzards** *Buteo lagopus* were in the Salthouse/Kelling (Norfolk) area from 23rd into November, at Filey on 27th, and two at Spurn on 26th and another on 28th. A Rhum wing-tagged **White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* at Insh in the Spey Valley (Highland) from 12th was nevertheless a magnificent sight, while a probable genuine immigrant on 27th was tracked from Filey south through Lincolnshire over Grainthorpe, Saltfleetby and Gibraltar Point and into The Wash—and now awaits discovery somewhere in southern England?



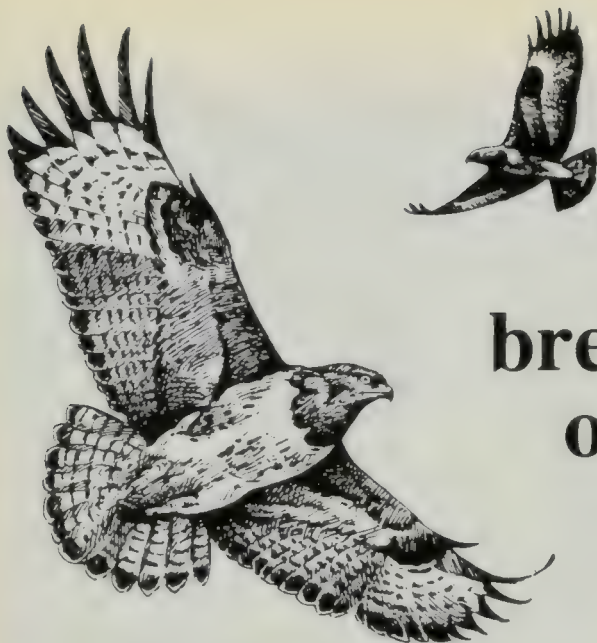
### Latest news

The suggestion at the end of the last paragraph was perceptive. In early December, not one but two **White-tailed Eagles** were discovered on the East Anglian coast, at Benacre (Suffolk) and on Scolt Head Island (Norfolk). Two October/November stars were still around: the **Nutcracker** at Westleton (Suffolk) and the **Sora** at Pagham (West Sussex). Newly discovered rarities included a **Sociable Plover** *Chettusia gregaria* at Blennerville (Co. Kerry) and a **Black-and-white Warbler** *Mniotilta varia* at Potter Heigham (Norfolk). A few **Rough-legged Buzzards** *Buteo lagopus* and large flocks of **Snow** *Plectrophenax nivalis* and **Lapland Buntings** *Calcarius lapponicus* were to be found on the British east coast.

## Seventy-five years ago...

'THE IRISH JAY. *Garrulus glandarius hibernicus* subsp. nov. BY H. F. WITHERBY AND E. HARTERT. In the *Birds of Ireland* (1900) Mr. R. J. Ussher remarks (p. 88):—"Mr. E. Williams, who has preserved a great many examples, thinks that the Irish Jay is of a warmer colour than the English bird." . . . That the Irish Jay is very different from the British Jay (*G. g. rufigerum*) is evident at a glance, while an examination of a series of specimens shows that the differences are constant, and any of the specimens we have examined can easily be picked out from a large series of British Jays.' (*Brit. Birds* 4: 234, January 1911)





# Notes on the breeding biology of the Buzzard

Geoffrey Fryer

**D**uring the 1970s and up to 1985, I made casual observations on the breeding behaviour of the Buzzard *Buteo buteo*. Most of these were in the southern part of the Lake District, Cumbria, but others made elsewhere during the same period are also referred to here. Although various aspects of the breeding behaviour of the Buzzard are well documented (e.g. Melde 1971; Picozzi & Weir 1974; Tubbs 1974; Cramp & Simmons 1980), my observations revealed several apparently little-known or undescribed facets.

## Nest-site marking by crag nesters

The habit of 'decorating' the nest with fresh sprays of green leaves is well known, but some generalised statements are not always factually correct and its significance is still subject to debate. The repairing and maintaining of old nests in seasons when they are not in use is also well known. What seems not to be recorded is that actual sites, at least crag sites, may be marked by depositing green material there, even though no nest is constructed.

In 1971, a pair of Buzzards nested on a crag in a Lakeland valley and raised one chick. This site was not used from 1972 to 1975, but, apart from noting the fact, I paid no attention to the nest ledge save recording that, on 26th April 1974, the nest was 'a wreck and not repaired at all'. On 21st April 1976, however, several shoots of holly *Ilex aquifolium* had been placed on the site. No attempt had been made to rebuild the nest, of which no more than a few old sticks persisted on the ledge. On 15th May, I found that, while one or two sticks had apparently been brought, no attempt had been made at nest rebuilding, yet several sprays of rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* had been placed on the site. On 22nd April 1977, no nest building had taken place, but two fresh green sprays of holly and one faded spray that had clearly been there longer were present; on 21st May, no additional material was present. On 23rd April 1978, on which date occupancy of another site within this territory was confirmed, two or three stalks of heather *Calluna vulgaris* had been brought and a few green holly shoots placed on the site. By 13th May, at least one further holly spray had been added, this despite a nest elsewhere in the territory having been occupied continuously since the first shoots were noted. This hints at the male being the bringer of the greenery, the female being usually otherwise engaged at this stage of breeding. Males certainly bring green sprays to occupied nests, although MacNally (1962) saw only the female do so during the post-hatching phase at a Scottish nest.

On 18th April 1979, a first, very rough attempt at remaking this nest had begun, and fresh

holly shoots (not an integral part of the structure) were again present. On 6th May, the nest was complete and contained what proved to be the full clutch of two eggs. The same ledge was thus re-used after seven years of disuse, though not complete abandonment. The position of the nest was virtually identical on each occasion. These observations show, incidentally, how quickly Buzzards can make a nest: not always is it completed 'long before they lay their eggs' (Bannerman 1956).

The marking of incomplete or vestigial nests with greenery and the phenomenon of nests being completed but not used had already been observed at alternative sites in this same valley. A well-fashioned nest found in 1970 was visited by a Buzzard which, however, used an alternative site. On 13th May 1971, the unused 1970 nest, although incomplete, was marked by three sprays of rowan which had obviously not long been in position. It was not used in 1972 and 1973 (no details kept of its condition). In 1974, it received some attention, but was not lined; on 29th March, however, several holly sprays were present, the nearest source being about 500 m distant, and on 26th April sprays of fresh rowan had been added. On 25th April 1975, sprays of holly were present, and on 20th May the nest had been made up and the female was brooding two eggs; one young was eventually reared. On 28th March 1976, two fern fronds (species not ascertained) lay on the unrepaired remains of this nest. On 21st April, these had withered, but no further green material had been added, nor was any found in 1977-85, and, following desultory repairs in 1977, the site appears to have been abandoned.

On 30th April 1983, a visit to a crag to which one of a pair of circling Buzzards had been seen to plunge directly and steeply some two weeks previously revealed a newly constructed, but incomplete, unlined, nest. Lying on it was a tuft of great wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica*, partly green, partly brown; two heather tufts, one greener than the other; and a green spike of whorled leaves, seen only through binoculars, possibly of fir clubmoss *Lycopodium selago*. Very little of the heather in the vicinity was green at this time in a late season, and the tufts present must have been assiduously sought.

On 25th May 1977, sprays of rowan were also found at a derelict nest visited by a Buzzard elsewhere in this valley, but such behaviour was not confined to one area. In an entirely different part of the Lake District, a nest used in 1973 (not examined in 1974) showed no sign of being remade on 26th April 1975, but a few fronds of polypody *Polypodium vulgare* had been placed at its centre. Particularly gratifying was a visit made on 29th April 1977, specifically to check this behaviour, to a crag site in a different Lakeland Valley where Buzzards reared two young in 1974, but which was known to have been unoccupied in 1975 and 1976. There, although some attention had possibly been paid to the sticks still present, no real attempt at nest making had been made, but three fresh sprays of holly had been placed on the ledge; these, but no additional green material, were still present on 20th May. A nest in a yet different valley produced one young from a single egg in 1982; in 1983, it retained much of its shape but was unrepaired, though a freshly severed spray of juniper *Juniperus communis* had been placed at its centre by 4th May, on which date the pair was occupying an adjacent, newly built, nest containing two eggs. By 29th April 1984, the same nest, still in good shape but unrepaired, had been marked by three separate sprays of juniper and a dead fern frond, and on 10th May 1985—by which date a few heather stalks had been added to the rim—the unlined nest cup again had a spray of juniper in its centre. Juniper grows nearby.

In another valley, a nest which in 1981 failed at the egg stage was not used in 1982, but on 8th May four faded holly sprays and a wilted, but clearly more recently placed rowan branch with a stem at least 8 mm in diameter was present on the unrepaired nest, and several tufts of mat-grass *Nardus stricta* (see below) were also present. As this nest never became badly trampled, the latter could conceivably have persisted from the previous year, or could have been added with the green material. In a different valley, a nest discovered on 1st June 1985, to which some attention had probably been paid in that year, had a fresh frond of rowan at its centre and a similar, wilted, frond at its rim.

The placing of green material at nest sites or incomplete nests was established on a total of at least 22 separate occasions, involving nine sites and several seasons. The number of visits on which this was brought must have been greater: for example, the four holly sprays at one site presumably involved four separate visits (not necessarily on the same day). That fresh greenery, sometimes unaccompanied by faded material, was seen on dates



ranging from 28th March to 1st June also hints at the possibility of renewal. Conclusive proof of the placing of greenery leading ultimately to nest making and egg laying, sometimes in subsequent years, was obtained at some sites. Equally conclusive proof of green material being placed on a previously used site that could not be used that year was also obtained, such material certainly being deposited at one site after nesting had begun elsewhere in the territory. Nevertheless, site-marking is by no means invariably practised. The first-mentioned site remained unused from 1980 to 1985, but no marking was observed. That the birds were aware of the site can hardly be doubted: a Buzzard was seen perched close to it early in the 1981 breeding season, leading me to suspect either nesting or at least marking, though neither occurred and no physical attention was paid to the site.

I have seen a fern frond on an unrepaired tree nest used in the previous season—a parallel to the marking of crag sites—but in trees such marking is possible only when a remnant of an old nest survives. I can find no reference to the use of green material on what are sometimes nestless crag sites, but Blezard (1933) noted that 'the earliest sign of activity sometimes is a leafy spray placed on an old nest'.

### Function of marking

Both Tubbs (1974) and Newton (1979) tentatively suggested that greenery may advertise territorial ownership, a conclusion also drawn by Blezard (1933) regarding leafy sprays on old nests and one which I had reached as a result of my own observations. Indeed, 'decoration' of sites on crags provides stronger support for this idea than does the marking of an actual nest. Greenery on a nest could conceivably serve other purposes, but it is difficult to envisage another function for sprays placed on a crag ledge. It is suggested that its employment is analogous to that of pheromones as territorial markers by mammals, in keeping with the dominance of the visual sense in birds and the olfactory in mammals. Indeed, the evidence is perhaps better than that for scent-marking in mammals, the significance of which is often ambiguous. The take-over of nests of other species and their decoration by Buzzards that do not lay in them is also in harmony with this theory. I have seen the crag nest of a Raven *Corvus corax* so bedecked with greenery; and, once, the nest of a Carrion Crow *C. corone* in an ash tree *Fraxinus excelsior*, in the territory of a pair of Buzzards which nested successfully on an adjacent crag, was completely lined with green sprays of ash, but was not otherwise used.

It is difficult to accept that the ultimate function of green material is to provide a soft bed of leaves on which the eggs are laid (e.g. Brown 1976), and *BWP* (Cramp & Simmons 1980) is misleading when it refers to the nestcup as being 'lined with green foliage prior to or during laying' as if this were invariably the case. Some nests are so lined, and indeed Picozzi & Weir (1974) used the lining of the nestcup with green material as one of the criteria for attempted nesting, but crag nests in the Lake District are generally not so lined. In fact, I have recorded only four cases of green material in the lining and never has the entire lining been so comprised. A

nest on a crag in the vicinity of which larches *Larix* were numerous was partially lined with larch shoots. Another was lined exclusively with great wood-rush, mostly brown leaves but including one large partly green tuft, presumably pulled from the base of a growing plant, incorporated near the edge of the cup; the solitary egg lay entirely on brown leaves. In another, a spray of Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* was included among otherwise dead material, and a further case involved the incorporation of a few soft, newly opened leaves of sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*. The experience of Blezard (1933) was evidently similar: he referred to 'grass, dead bracken and wood-rush' being used to line nests in the Lakeland Fells. It may be significant that my observations refer essentially to crag nests and those of Picozzi & Weir (1974), with one exception, to tree nests, but I doubt this, as even tree nests are not always so lined in the Lake District. Thus, in contrast to the crag nest that contained some larch shoots, a nest with two eggs built in a larch tree, and easily observable from the top of the crag on which the nest tree and other larches grew, included no larch shoots, nor any other green material, in the nestcup. While my data for tree nests are scanty in this respect, this is not the only case in which the eggs rested in a cup without any trace of greenery. This is sometimes also so in Denmark (see photograph in Wenzel 1959). Furthermore, the case of the usurped Carrion Crow nest, the only instance of green lining recorded, suggests that this need not necessarily be an indication of attempted nesting.

In Lake District crag nests, green material, which frequently includes tough, sharp-spined holly leaves quite unsuitable for providing a soft receptacle for the eggs, is generally placed at the margin of the nest in the early phases of nesting, not woven into its structure as Tubbs (1974) reported for the New Forest and as I have seen in Lakeland tree nests. It is much more usual to find green material, sometimes in copious amounts, laid across the nest when young are present, a situation quite contrary to the impression given in Cramp & Simmons (1980) that material may be added 'during incubation and even fledging periods'. Generalisation is clearly dangerous.

### Other evidence of site ownership

That Buzzards sometimes take a proprietary interest in old nest sites is indicated both by their visiting such sites in years when they are not used, which I have observed on several occasions, and by behaviour of a different kind. On one occasion, before egg laying could be expected, as I scrambled to an ancient and clearly long-disused site on a small low crag, on which no greenery was found, an airborne Buzzard began to call persistently. In some circumstances this could have indicated an undetected nest nearby, but in this case this was certainly not so, and I had a very strong impression that the bird 'resented' intrusion onto its 'property', although that property was untenanted and had been for some time. Several years later, in 1983, Buzzards again used this small crag, three eggs being found in a nest on another ledge. I have also seen Buzzards either perched near or 'playing' in the vicinity of old nest sites on crags where the nest was unrepaired in that breeding season. In one such case, in a valley different from any mentioned



above, this was followed by the discovery later in the season of a nest containing two eggs about 200 m away.

### Nests and sites

While most crag nests conform broadly to descriptions in the literature, their structure is not rigidly stereotyped, nor is it necessarily determined by the accessibility of materials. A Buzzard nest is by no means always the 'substantial structure' described by Cramp & Simmons (1980). A southern Scottish nest with two small young was on a grassy ledge on which the eggs must have been laid directly, such hollowing as was apparent being no more than would result from brooding activities and the consequent killing of the grass. Two or three stalks of heather were present, but no nest at all had been constructed. Although the area was largely treeless, heather stalks were readily available, so the lack of sticks was not dictated by circumstances. The 'Additions & Corrections' to *The Handbook* (Witherby *et al.* 1944) mention the nest as 'occasionally very slight', while Blezard (1933, 1946a) reported flimsy nests consisting of 'a few scraps of plant stalks surrounding a hollow in turf' and referred to a ground nest that was 'simply a scrape lined with tufts of grass' (Blezard 1946b). A nest that I found on a broad grassy ledge in the Howgill Fells consisted essentially of a lined hollow, with no more than a few token sticks around it, that in no way resembled a true stick nest. Similar nests, but with rather more sticks, have been seen in the Lake District.

Where the nestcup occupies a natural hollow (or one resulting from long usage?) on the ledge, the sticks may be no more than a perhaps functionless adornment of a rim of earthy or rooted plant material. When the nestcup abuts the crag face, sticks may be used only on the outer side, where they form a more or less semicircular rim. They may be scanty, or sufficiently numerous to make a veritable barricade. Other nests have a large, almost perfectly circular, peripheral array of sticks. The central cup, when present, is variable in diameter: in one nest, built of large sticks, it barely encircled the three eggs; in others, it is larger.

### Nest-lining material

Notwithstanding the emphatic denial of Walpole-Bond (1914), sheep's wool may be incorporated into the lining, although this is not common. It may also sometimes be found at the edge of the central cup, and I have seen a little added with green material in a nest that held well-feathered young. Philipson (1948) also noted the occasional presence of 'a little wool' in the nest lining in Lakeland nests, and wool has been found in the lining of Pennine nests (Blezard 1933; Brown 1974).

On several occasions, a newly built nest has contained the basal parts of one or more dead tufts of mat-grass. Some nests are partially lined with such tufts, which may conceivably act as markers as well as lining material. Tufts commonly lie about on hillsides, and must be easily acquired. I have also seen tufts of mat-grass at the edge of a crag nest containing young in Scotland, as well as in northern England.

Altitude

Lake District nests with two eggs at about 1,900 feet (579 m) and at just over 2,000 feet (610 m), respectively, and one with three eggs, all of which hatched, at about 2,100 feet (640 m), all in the same territory, appear to be above the usual limits there. Blezard *et al.* (1943) stated that crag-nesting in the area occurs 'up to 1500 feet [460 m] and occasionally up to 1750 [530 m]', but Brown (1974) reported breeding at up to 2,000 feet. The next highest site that I have found was at about 1,800 feet (550 m), but the nest held no eggs or young; another site, used twice, was at over 1,700 feet (520 m). Farther north, Weir & Picozzi (1983) recorded 380 m (1,250 feet) as the upper limit of altitude for the nest of a Buzzard in Speyside.

Altitudes of Lake District nests, plus one from the adjacent Howgill Fells, that I have seen and for which data are recorded are shown in table 1. The highest tree nest was in a downy birch *Betula pubescens* in a sheltered ravine.

Table 1. Altitudes of nest sites of Buzzards *Buteo buteo* in the Lake District, Cumbria (plus one Howgill Fells crag site), 1970s-1985

	Heights of trees ignored Crag nests	Tree nests
No. nests	38 (8 not in use)	54 (13 not in use)
ft	550-2,100	460-1,500
Range m	168-640	140-457
ft	1,267	685
Mean m	386	209
No. (%) at 1,000 ft (305 m) or above	29 (76%)	3 (6%)

Tree species used

Tree nesters are reputed to show a preference for conifers (e.g. Brown 1976; Cramp & Simmons 1980), but availability (Melde 1971) and individual idiosyncracies are clearly involved. In one territory, I have seen three different occupied nests in a rather small group of larches, but an oak *Quercus* at the edge of this group has also been used. An unoccupied nest was in a solitary sycamore in the middle of a small plantation of apparently suitable larches. Trees seen to be used in the Lake District, so far as they were recorded, are indicated in table 2.

Table 2. Trees used for nesting by Buzzards *Buteo buteo* in the Lake District, Cumbria, for which records were kept, 1970s-1985

The oaks were almost certainly all sessile oak <i>Q. petraea</i> , and the larches probably all <i>L. europaea</i>	
Tree species	No. nests
Oak <i>Quercus</i>	19
Larch <i>Larix</i>	9
Scots pine <i>Pinus sylvestris</i>	8
Downy birch <i>Betula pubescens</i>	3
Ash <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	3
Beech <i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	2
Sycamore <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	2
Fir <i>Abies</i>	2
Alder <i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	1



### **Crags versus trees**

My observations do not support the suggestion of Tubbs (1974) that trees appear to be favoured as nest sites where they are available, nor his inference from BTO nest record cards that sites other than those in woodland tend to be used of necessity rather than from preference. Brown (1976) made even more categorical assertions of the same kind. The lowest-lying Lake District sites, in Borrowdale at about 550 feet (168 m) and in Dunnerdale at 600 feet (183 m), offered abundant alternatives in trees, and a nest in Longsleddale at 620 feet (189 m) was on a small rocky outcrop surrounded by suitable trees. Three other crag sites, all below 1,000 feet (305 m), had tree nests nearby. At two of these, adjacent tree and crag nests were certainly used in consecutive years; in one case, the same female, recognised by her aggressive behaviour, was almost certainly involved (Fryer 1974).

### **Periodicity of occupation**

Lakeland crag nests seem generally to be vacated after a year's use, although, as some sites were checked only intermittently or never revisited, examples of use in the following year may have been missed. While information is sporadic, I have details of 23 crag sites used in one year but not the next, but none of use in two successive years.

A tree nest in an oak, however, was used for at least nine and probably ten consecutive years since first found, and could have been in use before this. Particularly noteworthy is that the sixth year of occupancy (1980) followed failure from an unknown cause in 1979, while fidelity to this site was demonstrated even more strongly by the return of the pair to the same nest in 1983, following human interference and desertion in 1982. Holdsworth (1971) noted that re-use was more likely after success than after failure. A pair was present for the tenth consecutive year early in the 1984 season, one of the birds being seen at the decorated nest, but laying was not proved and the nest was later deserted for reasons unknown; in 1985, the nest was repaired and decorated, but only a single bird was ever seen there. Whether this persistent occupancy always involved one or more of the previous year's users is not known. By contrast, the nearest neighbours of this pair used six different tree nests in eight years, and only once used the same nest in two consecutive years. Perhaps as a result of tree-felling, this pair was not located in the ninth year of observations, but it nested again in the same wood in 1984, after an absence of four years.

### **Passerine nestlings as prey**

Although Cramp & Simmons (1980) mentioned 'nestlings and just-fledged young', without clear distinction, as prey of the Buzzard, there seem to be very few published references to nestlings and even less information on the age of such prey. Tubbs (1974) recorded just one nestling Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* among the large number of items brought to 81 Buzzard nests over a nine-year period in the New Forest, Hampshire, where avian prey is unusually important. Being of a hole-nesting species, however, and presumably sufficiently well feathered to permit recognition,

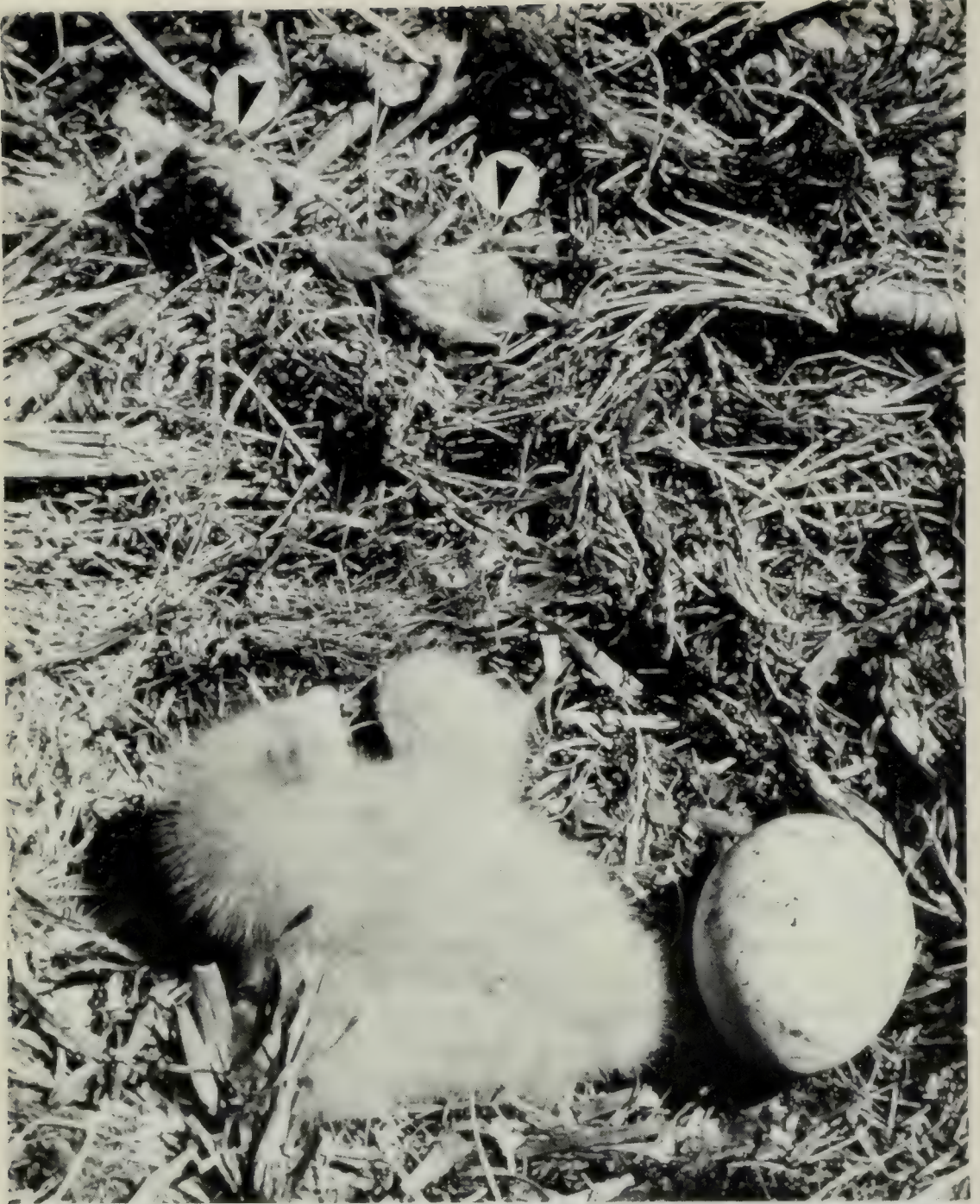
this bird seems unlikely to have been taken from a nest. Newly fledged small passerines are certainly captured, and it is not always possible to ascertain whether young birds brought to a Buzzard nest were removed from their own nest or taken after fledging. Although MacNally (1970) referred to the taking of nestlings, this seems to have been inferred from a curious case where the nest, but no young, of a Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* was found at a Buzzard nest, and he listed no nestling among over 200 prey items recorded at nests, though these included several fledglings. A related case of apparent nest plundering, for which the evidence is also somewhat circumstantial, refers to the apparent taking of embryonated eggs of a Blackbird *Turdus merula* (Streeck 1969). There is, however, one positive report of the taking of naked nestlings. Among prey found at Buzzard nests, Wendland (1933) reported three unfledged thrushes, possibly Mistle Thrushes *T. viscivorus*, about 8-10 days old, and also two headless, naked young birds.

On five occasions in four different years, naked or near-naked nestlings were seen at the nests of Lakeland Buzzards; some, probably all, were Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis*, and all were intact. On each occasion, the recipient Buzzards were downy young. In one case, a nest containing one chick aged less than two days old and a hatching egg had been provisioned with two naked Meadow Pipit nestlings; one such nestling was seen at the same nest when the young were about seven and five days old. At another nest containing one young Buzzard about four days old, three naked nestlings were present (presumably the product of one nest). Two nearly naked Meadow Pipit nestlings were present at a nest containing a Buzzard chick about five days old and an unhatched egg (plate 34); just over four hours later these had gone, presumably having been fed to the chick, and had been replaced by the fragmentary remains of a pigeon *Columba*, probably a scavenged kill of a Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*. At another nest, a Buzzard no more than 14-15 days old was seen to swallow such a nestling unaided: it seized the nestling and several times flung back its head, the prey's legs flopping back at each fling. According to Tubbs (1974), young Buzzards can swallow small rodents whole at the age of one month, but they can perform even this feat much earlier than this (see Wenzel 1959). The ingestion of a small passerine nestling must present fewer problems.

It may be coincidental that such prey were recorded only at nests containing small young. If brought later (and Meadow Pipits are usually at least double-brooded), such items may be quickly swallowed and therefore missed by the casual observer. On the other hand, there may be a correlation between the collection of very soft morsels and the needs and abilities of small young. Indeed, such items would make but a small contribution to the needs of large young. A somewhat older nestling (a Meadow Pipit?) whose wing quills were just developing was also seen at a nest containing two young Buzzards about four and two days old and a hatching egg.

Remains of feathered Meadow Pipits, in one case possibly obtained from a nest, were also seen among the prey. Uttendörfer (1952) noted that many of the avian prey at Buzzard nests are young birds. This is not surprising, as the Buzzard's breeding season coincides with the time when young, inexperienced birds are particularly abundant.





34. Crag nest of Buzzard *Buteo buteo* with near-naked nestlings of Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* (arrowed) at margin, and Buzzard chick about five days old and infertile egg; much use of tufts of mat-grass *Nardus stricta* at margin of nest cup (see text), Cumbria, May 1985 (G. Fryer)

That young are sometimes seized from the nests of larger birds is shown by several incidents. E. Taylforth (*in litt.*) saw a Buzzard fly to the tree nest of a Carrion Crow and 'hook out' a young bird, which fell to the ground. The parent crows, with others attracted by their calls, drove off the attacker. When examined, the victim was found to be dead and to have 'a hole in its neck', presumably made by the claw of the Buzzard. I observed what was conceivably a similar sortie by a Buzzard which dived into the wooded side of a valley; where it disappeared, a cacophony of frenzied



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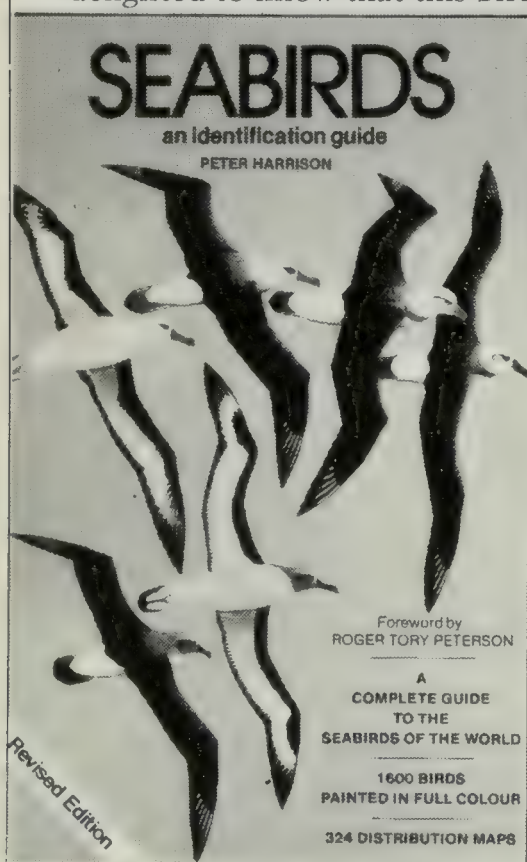
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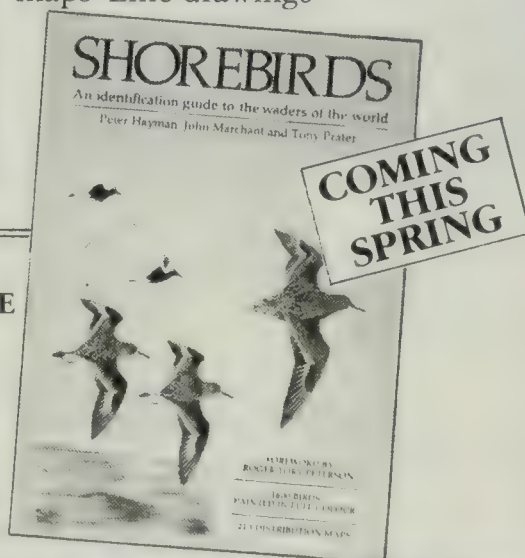
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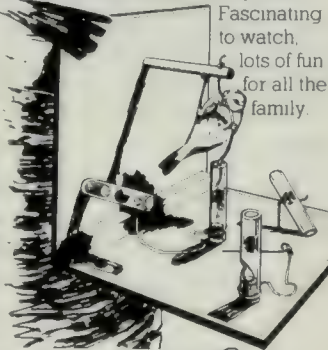
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alarm calls of Carrion Crows immediately arose. Coombs (1978) recorded that in 1955, when Buzzards were experiencing a severe food shortage following the effects of myxomatosis on the population of rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, 'well-grown nestling rooks [*Corvus frugilegus*] were repeatedly taken from the nest and tree branches at a rookery . . . in Cornwall'. A case of a Buzzard at the nest of a Magpie *Pica pica* is reported elsewhere (Fryer 1986). Remains of feathered young crows were seen several times at Buzzard nests. Some could conceivably have been taken before fledging, but there is no proof of this, and I have on several occasions known Carrion Crows to nest, apparently unmolested, sometimes in open sites, in the territory of a pair of Buzzards. Richmond (1959) also mentioned Wood-pigeon *Columba palumbus* squabs brought to the nest.

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Dr D. A. Ratcliffe and D. A. Christie for helpful comments on the original typescript, and to the former for drawing my attention to an early paper by E. Blezard.

## Summary

During the 1970s and up to 1985, casual observations were made on breeding Buzzards *Buteo buteo* in the Lake District, Cumbria. Details are given of the habit of 'decorating' nestless crag sites, as well as nests, with fresh greenery. The function of this behaviour, which seems to be to show territorial ownership, is discussed, and other evidence of ownership is outlined. Buzzard nests on crags vary considerably in structure, and may be no more than a lined hollow with a few token sticks added. The highest nest was at 2,100 feet (640 m). Tree nesters used a variety of broadleaved and coniferous tree species. Crag sites appear usually to be vacated after one year's use, whereas one tree site was occupied for nine or ten consecutive years. Among avian prey brought to the nest, naked or near-naked nestlings were found on five occasions. Nestlings of birds the size of Carrion Crows *Corvus corone* are sometimes taken.

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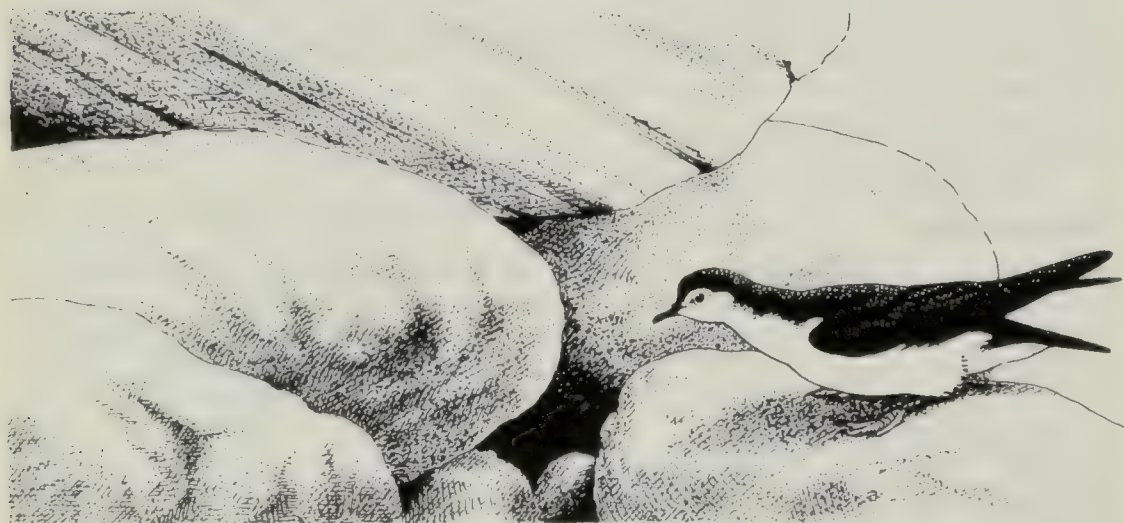
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## Little Shearwaters in Britain and Ireland



*P. C. James*

**T**he Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* occurs as a breeding species in the southern section of the eastern North Atlantic (Cramp & Simmons 1977). Although it is supposed to lack a definite migration, it has become increasingly clear that the species is a regular visitor to British and Irish waters (Sharrock & Sharrock 1976; Wallace & Bourne 1981). This was dramatically emphasised in 1982, when a Little Shearwater was captured ashore at the large colony of Manx Shearwaters *P. puffinus* on Skomer Island, Dyfed, Wales (James & Alexander 1984). The following is an account of this exciting event, with some comment on its possible significance.

The night of 26th June began like any other that summer. At the time, I was a graduate student of the Edward Grey Institute, studying the vocal behaviour of nocturnal Procellariiformes (James 1984), and was working in a colony of Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus*. Just after midnight, I heard the call of a bird with which I was unfamiliar. My first impression was that it was an Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, until I realised that it was coming from beneath the boulder slope a few metres away. Moving some rocks, I was able to see part of a shearwater. Satisfied for the moment that the bird was an aberrant Manx Shearwater, I returned to my work.

Three nights later, the site was revisited, and again the calling was heard, quite distinct from that of the surrounding Manx Shearwaters. Fortunately, the bird was sitting at an entrance to the boulder pile, and was easily captured. Only then did I realise the full significance of the discovery. My first impression was that this was indeed a Little Shearwater, being about half the size of a Manx, with pale blue legs and feet. The bird was hastily photographed and returned to the boulder entrance, for fear of disturbing it further. Later that same night, the bird was heard calling in flight over the boulder slope. Its silhouette was clearly visible against the sky, and allowed its fluttering flight to be seen, an action quite different from that of the accompanying Manx Shearwaters. While the bird was in flight, the rocks were searched for others, but none was found. A small quantity of vegetation had, however, been laid at the end of a burrow.

The bird revisited the site over the next several nights, first calling in flight before landing and returning to the burrow, where it continued to call. It would periodically leave the burrow, and again call in flight, a behaviour now known to function as a sexual advertisement by Manx Shearwaters (James 1985). On the night of 1st July, I managed to obtain a tape recording of the bird in its burrow (fig. 1). Subsequent playback of this recording to the bird, either in flight or in the burrow, elicited a strong vocal response. That same night, similar habitat on the remainder of the island was thoroughly searched, and the recording played aloud, but no other Little Shearwaters were found.

After much deliberation, it was decided that the bird should be

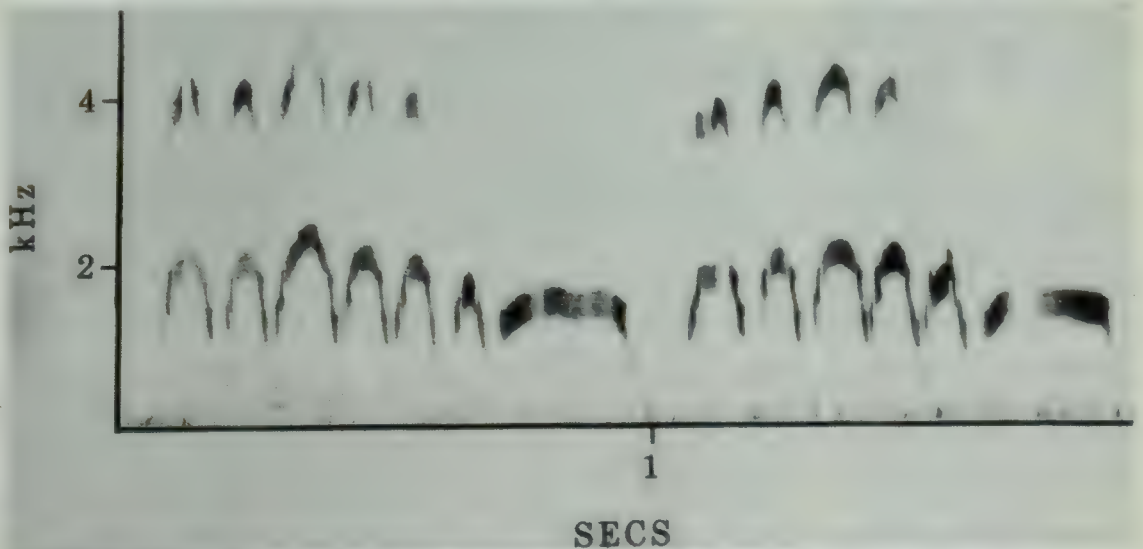


Fig. 1. Sonagram of call of Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis*, Dyfed, July 1981



recaptured, and a thorough field description taken. This was done on 7th July, when it was again photographed (plates 35 & 36) and also ringed. Another inspection of the burrow revealed that additional vegetation had been brought in. The field description follows:

**GENERAL SHAPE** Very similar to Manx Shearwater, but approximately half the size. Wings proportionately shorter than Manx. Head proportionately larger, with steeper forehead. Eyes appeared larger in proportion compared with Manx.

**PLUMAGE** *Head:* Crown and nape black with greyish sheen. Supercilium white. Lores dark. Chin, ear-coverts and throat white. Sides of neck mottled grey and white. *Back and rump:* Black. *Breast, belly and flanks:* White. *Tail:* Uppertail-coverts black. Undertail-coverts white, longest feathers having small areas of light grey. Tail feathers black above, pale grey below. Tail slightly wedge-shaped. *Wings:* Upperwing black. Underwing: primaries and secondaries grey; all coverts including axillaries white; leading edge mottled grey. *Moult:* None noted.

**BARE PARTS** *Legs and feet:* Upper leg surface pale blue on leading edge. Pale blue toes. Black outer edge of leg and toes. Inner edge of toes and leg pale blue. Under leg black with flesh-coloured patch on mid-tarsal joint. Upper webs paler blue with pink veining. Under webs black with flesh-coloured patches. *Bill:* Upper mandible black. Lower mandible black with blue-grey at side of base. Shape similar to Manx but more delicate. *Eye:* Black.

**MEASUREMENTS** *Tarsus:* 36.5 mm (from mid-tarsal joint to distal end of tarso-metatarsus). *Bill length:* 25.2 mm (from dorsal edge of feathering to hook). *Bill depth:* 6.0 mm (at gonys). *Total head length:* 64.0 mm (including bill). *Wing:* 175 mm (flattened chord). *Tail:* 67 mm (from base of central feathers to their tips).

The bird's white underwing and undertail-coverts identified its race as *baroli*, the Madeiran race of Little Shearwater (Cramp & Simmons 1977). All specimen records of the Little Shearwater in the United Kingdom have been of this race (Sharrock & Sharrock 1976).

The bird remained at the island, visiting on most dark nights through to 10th July, but it did not reappear during the August new moon. Because the individual was clearly prospecting, and not storm-driven, it was decided not to release immediately the news of its discovery.

Much to my astonishment, a Little Shearwater appeared on Skomer the following year. Its call was first noted on 21st June, this time from a location about 5 m from the previous one. The call was identical to that of the 1981 bird, and the bird's ring number confirmed that the same individual had indeed returned. Again, it visited the colony on most nights during the new moon period up to 25th July, and did not reappear in August. It was not seen or heard in 1983, despite a complete search of the island. A second individual, identified as such by its voice, was, however, once heard calling in flight in another location on 3rd May\*.

Two years following the first Skomer capture, I had the good fortune to visit Great Salvage Island, some 200 km to the south of Madeira, and a breeding station of the Madeiran Little Shearwater. It felt somewhat odd to be at the possible birthplace of the Skomer bird. My research there showed that, like the Manx Shearwater (Brooke 1978) and Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* (Ristow & Wink 1980), the Little Shearwater is sexually dimorphic in voice (James & Robertson 1985). The males have a clearer, higher-pitched call than the females, which possess a lower-pitched, more raspy call. It was thus established that the bird prospecting on Skomer was

\*This 'call-only' record has not been accepted by the Rarities Committee. EDS



35 & 36. Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis*, Dyfed, July 1981 (C. M. Perrins)



a male, and that the second individual, heard in flight on 3rd May 1983, was a female.

Since the Skomer observations have become more widely known, some people have wondered whether the old Skokholm Island records of 'runt' Manx Shearwaters (Perrins *et al.* 1965) were in fact Little Shearwaters. While this is possible, I personally doubt it. The 'runts' on the island were



found as a result of intensive ringing studies. The smaller size, combined with the blue legs and feet of a Little Shearwater, would probably not have escaped the attention of an experienced ringer.

The occurrence of at least one prospecting Little Shearwater on Skomer raises the possibility that the species may be colonising islands farther north than its usual breeding range. While the likelihood of this happening is remote, it should not be entirely dismissed. For example, in 1977, a colony of Manx Shearwaters was found breeding for the first time in North America (Lien & Grimmer 1978). For several years prior to this discovery, they had been seen and heard in increasing numbers on and around the island in question. One captured ashore had even been ringed as a chick on Skokholm six years previously. This new Canadian colony is still apparently thriving (Storey & Lien 1985). The example illustrates that shearwaters are capable of long-distance colonisation, and this should be borne in mind when considering the likelihood of Little Shearwaters doing so.

Examination of accepted Little Shearwater records published in *British Birds* over the last 25 years does not seem to indicate that the species is increasing around our coasts. It would be wrong, however, to place too much confidence on these as a true index of abundance owing to the unknown amount of effort put in by seawatchers over the years. The majority of Little Shearwater records occur in autumn, although there has been a recent trend for more summer records, possibly supporting the colonisation theory. Little Shearwater records also seem to go in cycles. For example, there were two records for the period 1958-60, then a gap of three years, followed by 26 records for the period 1964-68. This was again followed by a gap, this time of four years. Then, 23 records occurred in the period 1973-78, again followed by a lull. Whether these appearances reflect changing oceanographic features or variations in seawatching effort is unclear, although it is not likely to be entirely due to the latter.

With the increased interest in seawatching, a challenge has been issued for more reliable small shearwater identification. This problem has been recently tackled in an excellent discussion by Curtis, Lassey & Wallace (1985). I can add no improvement to this treatise on birds-at-sea identification, but perhaps can offer some thoughts to the many people, especially ringers, who visit offshore islands around Britain and Ireland each year.

The first point regards the habitat that the Skomer bird was found in. As at its breeding grounds farther south (Cramp & Simmons 1977; own observations), the bird chose rock piles as opposed to the usual turf habitat of Manx Shearwaters. In this respect, it is similar to our Storm Petrel, and, as previously mentioned, the Little Shearwater was located in the middle of a colony of these birds. Ringers of Storm Petrels should, therefore, take particular note.

The second point concerns the timing of the Skomer bird's appearances. The Little Shearwater's breeding season in the south extends from February to May (Jouanin 1964). The Skomer visits coincided with the post-breeding arrival of Little Shearwaters at their breeding colonies. The

age composition of these birds has yet to be determined, but, based on captures of ringed birds on Great Salvage in 1983, they do include birds of breeding age (own observations). Breeding, if it is to occur on our coasts, could therefore take place earlier in the year, and, similarly, so could Little Shearwater visitation to potential nesting areas.

The last point regards the call of the Little Shearwater. It is very distinctive, being quicker and higher-pitched than that of the Manx Shearwater. Visitors to islands with rock habitat should therefore listen carefully to the surrounding cacophony of Manx Shearwaters. They could be surprised by what they find.

## Acknowledgments

I should like to thank the Nature Conservancy Council and the West Wales Naturalists' Trust for permission to conduct research on Skomer, and the Portuguese National Parks for permission to visit the Salvages. Travel assistance to the Salvages was provided by the Portuguese Navy, the Royal Society, Wolfson College, and the Zoology Department at Oxford.

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P. C. James, Edward Grey Institute, Zoology Department, South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PS (Present address: Department of Veterinary Anatomy, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Sask., S7N 0W0, Canada)



# Mystery photographs

**109** Last month's four pipit photographs (repeated here as plates 37-40) were taken by Dr Klaus Robin in Switzerland, where the bird was present for several days in December/January 1982/83. They are selected from a series of 12 black-and-white prints sent to the Rarities Committee by Dr Roland Luder for an opinion on the identity of the bird.





37-40. Mystery photographs 109 (Klaus Robin)

Brief accompanying notes referred to a cream-coloured breast, rather yellowish-brown upperparts, flesh-coloured legs, and a call resembling that of Dunnock *Prunella modularis* or Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*. The choice was between Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* and Red-throated Pipit *A. cervinus* in one of its non red-throated plumages. There was strong initial opinion that it was a Red-throated Pipit (9:1 in favour on the first circulation). The eventual clear majority view, however, was for Meadow Pipit: including the opinions of three international experts also consulted, the final votes were ten for Meadow, one for Red-throated (an unrepentant JTRS), and two undecided.

It must be said at the outset that the severity of the problem set here is rather artificial. In the real field situation, Red-throated Pipit is almost always first identified by its flight call, which when heard fully is to some ears among the most distinctive of all bird noises: a very high-pitched, penetrating 'psssss', which starts emphatically and trails off to an almost inaudible finish, lasting a full half-second. Some observers apparently have trouble in distinguishing the call from that of Olive-backed Pipit *A. hodgsoni* or Tree Pipit *A. trivialis* (*Brit. Birds* 73: 233; 74: 228-229), but at least it's quite unlike the short, squeaky notes of Meadow Pipit. The Dunnock- or Reed Bunting-like call described for this bird does not help: *which* of the varied calls of these species did it resemble? With a stretched imagination, this imprecise description could fit either Red-throated or Meadow.

In the field, differences in colour tones would also be helpful. Red-throated always lacks Meadow's usually obvious yellowish-olive tones on the upperparts and ear-coverts, and is instead generally greyish, greyish-brown or obviously brownish-toned in these areas, much depending on the light. The 'rather yellowish-brown' upperparts noted for the mystery bird





41. Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*, Netherlands, April 1983 (Arnoud B. van den Berg)

therefore seems to be a clear point in favour of Meadow. Also, the colour of the pale markings on the upperparts and wings, and—especially—the base-colour on the flanks and breast of Red-throated is usually obviously creamier or whiter than that of Meadow, which is usually pale buffy-yellow in these areas. The infrequent ‘grey-and-white morph’ Meadow Pipits (which may be familiar to observers who search pipit flocks in autumn: on Scilly, for example, something like one in 200 is of this type) can look like Red-throateds in these respects, however, with the result that it would take the sharpest of observers confidently to claim a Red-throated without hearing the call or seeing the diagnostic finely streaked rump (plain on Meadow). The mystery bird unhelpfully managed to keep its rump hidden in the whole 12-print series, but the ‘cream-coloured breast’ seems to be a contradictory point in favour of Red-throated. As an aside, it would be interesting to know what these ‘grey-and-white morph’ Meadow Pipits are. Perhaps the coloration is age-related, or that of a particular geographic population, or (in my view most likely) just the extreme of a cline of colour variation. In addition, Red-throated tends to look slightly heavier and shorter-tailed (especially in flight), like Tree Pipit, and Meadow has a very short projection of primaries beyond the tertials, which is tiny or lacking on Red-throated (plate 39 seems to show a Meadow-like wing-structure, but it is debatable).

So, for silent, ‘rumpless’ birds (or black-and-white photographs) the best

clinchers probably lie in the following differences in plumage patterns and tones:

**HEAD** Differences are sometimes slight, but Red-throated tends to show a more darkly streaked crown, longer and more defined supercilium, more uniformly dark ear-coverts, bolder and 'cleaner' pale submoustachial stripe, and malar stripe ending in a larger dark patch at sides of lower throat.

**UPPERPARTS** Red-throated shows pale stripes or 'tramlines' at the sides of the mantle, but, because they are whiter and are outlined with blackish stripes, they are more contrasting and obvious than the similar marks shown by many Meadow Pipits. The centres of the wing-coverts and tertials are darker, giving slightly greater contrast with the whiter fringes than is the case with Meadow.

42. Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, Kenya, February 1973 (J. F. Reynolds)





**UNDERPARTS** The breast-streaking on Red-throated is more strongly contrasting, better-defined, slightly bolder and—most important—more continuous than on Meadow, giving a more striped, less streaked appearance. On Red-throated, the breast-streaking usually extends down the full length of the flanks at the same strength (usually showing as two bold, black stripes), whereas on Meadow the flank-streaking is thinner and more broken than the streaking on its breast.

The mystery bird's head pattern is better for Meadow, with subdued supercilium which also gives greater contrast to a pale eye-ring, and rather pale-centred ear-coverts. Allowing for photographic effects which can exaggerate contrasts, the mantle, wing-covert and tertial patterns of the mystery bird also seem well within the range of Meadow. Allowing for the fluffed-out breast-feathers in some photographs (e.g. plate 39), which exaggerates the thickness of the streaks, the breast does not seem sufficiently boldly striped for a Red-throated; indeed, plate 40 (in which the breast-feathers are sleeked down) shows an unremarkable, Meadow-like pattern. On the flanks, the streaking is clearly thinner and more broken than on the breast, and does not show as two bold stripes (although caution is clearly necessary over how the feathers lie and how much of the flanks are concealed under the wing), and this is perhaps the strongest single pro-Meadow feature in the photographs.

The Rarities Committee thanks Dr Luder for posing this hopefully instructive problem, and Per Alström, Jon Dunn and Killian Mullarney for their valued comments.

PJG

43. Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, Kenya, February 1973 (J. F. Reynolds)





44. Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*, Dumfriesshire, summer 1975 (*Robert T. Smith*)

45. Mystery photograph 110. Identify the species. Answer next month





# Notes

## Separation of distant Black-throated and Great Northern Divers

For the last 15 and more years, I have spent some considerable time watching divers *Gavia* in winter. While some Black-throated *G. arctica* and Great Northern Divers *G. immer* can occasionally be difficult to distinguish at long range, I have frequently found that, apart from the former's white flank patch (only recently properly documented, *Brit. Birds* 71: 225-226), the bill can be a more useful feature at a distance than is generally realised. When the flank patch is not readily visible, for example in rough seas (although it is then usually obvious when the bird dives), the bill of Black-throated, when seen in reasonable light with the light source shining directly on it, and particularly in a diagonal view from the front, often appears as a gleaming, narrow, protracted ivory-white or blue-white line. This effect results presumably not only from the bill colour (light grey with darker culmen and tip on adult, bluish-white on juveniles), but also from its shape, coupled with the fact that the border between the dark forehead and crown and the pale sides to the face tends to be sharper and more regular in outline than on Great Northern. The latter would presumably not show this narrow-line effect because of its different bill and head shape and different head-plumage pattern. All the distant divers showing this gleaming narrow-line effect have been confirmed as Black-throats when they have approached more closely, whereas I have never seen a Great Northern Diver display this same feature. Some distant Great Northerns may appear to have a pale blob in the bill area, but never a narrow line.

Although most photographs do not show this narrow-line effect (they are usually, of course, of divers at close range), comparison of plates 18 and 19 in the February 1981 issue of *British Birds* shows well how it could be brought about in the case of one species and not the other.

DAVID A. CHRISTIE

4 Steventon Road, Harefield, Southampton SO2 5HA

A paper on diver identification by Ron Appleby and Steve Madge, with illustrations by Killian Mullarney, will be published shortly. Eds

**Buzzard and crows at Magpie nest** On 3rd June 1984, not far from Windermere, Cumbria, I was attracted by a concourse of crows, mostly Rooks *Corvus frugilegus* and Jackdaws *C. monedula*, but also a few Carrion Crows *C. corone*, which were noisily flying around, and stooping within, a small area. The centre of their interest was a small, dense plantation of young Sitka spruce *Picea sitchensis*, over one point of which they were concentrated and to which they frequently dived or descended. No estimate of the number of birds involved was made, but it was certainly several dozen, and others, mostly Jackdaws, were flying around or standing on the



adjacent rough field at the periphery of the area of activity. As I approached, partly obscured by a stone wall, I heard above me the calls of (predominantly) the Rooks, the frenzied calls of a Magpie (or Magpies) *Pica pica* and the screaming of young Magpies. I entered the plantation, causing only slight disturbance of the black crows, and was completely hidden after entry. The tree whence came the Magpie calls was not far from the edge of the plantation, and I began to climb it. So dense was the foliage that I could not see the nest that was obviously above; nor could I be seen, and the loud calls masked any sound I made. Perhaps 4 m or a little more from the ground, and not far from the top of the tree, I saw a damaged Magpie nest. As my head was just below it, a young Magpie left and disappeared into the adjacent trees; then, from just above me and previously hidden by the nest (on which it had probably been standing) a Buzzard *Buteo buteo* also flew from it and disappeared over the trees. I quickly descended and, a few minutes later, as I emerged from the plantation, the Buzzard reappeared, pursued by a dozen or more crows, seemingly all Rooks; it was still being harried as it departed across the field.

The incident is noteworthy in several respects. It adds to the scanty direct evidence of Buzzards raiding the nests of crows (remains of crows are not infrequent at Buzzard nests, but whether taken from nests or as fledged birds is seldom ascertainable); it shows that some individuals will enter dense vegetation in order to do so, and that they may even dismember Magpie nests to obtain the young. It is of interest that mobbing should simultaneously involve no fewer than three crow species, none conspecific with that whose nest was being attacked, and whose calls indicated active defence (though this could not be seen). Relations between some of the crows are not always 'amicable'. The number of individuals involved is also striking. What the outcome of the incident would have been had I not intruded can only be conjectured, but as the nest was partly dismembered there is little doubt that the Buzzard could have seized a young Magpie, and perhaps did so. In retrospect, I should have tried to ascend farther and look into the damaged nest.

G. FRYER

*Elleray Cottage, Windermere, Cumbria LA23 1AW*

**Woodcock apparently attacking Nightjar** On 29th June 1982, at Headley Heath, Surrey, from less than 10m in light that was fading, but still adequate for accurate observation, I was watching a male Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, one of several present, quartering its breeding territory in low hawking flight. A Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* had been roding in the area for 30 minutes. Suddenly, what was presumably the same Woodcock stooped vertically at the Nightjar, from a height of 10-12m, missing it by about 15cm. The latter's response was a slight deviation in its level flight. The Woodcock chased it for a few metres, and both birds then flew off in opposite directions until out of sight. Although the Nightjars and the Woodcock had been calling regularly before the incident, no calls were heard during it.

ANTHONY WEBB

*1 Woolacombe Road, Blackheath, London SE3 8QJ*



**Ring-billed Gulls displaying in West Glamorgan** The note by R. H. Davies, P. G. Akers and I. F. Tew (*Brit. Birds* 77: 208) on Ring-billed Gulls *Larus delawarensis* displaying in West Glamorgan on 27th April 1983 suggested that this was the first occasion of such display at Blackpill, Swansea Bay.

This, however, is not the case, for I observed two adults in summer plumage displaying at the same locality, in excellent light conditions, at 19.30 GMT on 17th April 1983. One approached the other in 'submissive posture' without receiving in return any sign of aggressive behaviour. The two birds frequently uttered loud 'kee-ew' calls, with their heads raised almost vertically. They alternated the submissive posture and, when approached closely by nearby Common Gulls *L. canus*, uttered a 'mewing' threat call.

Two adults were again observed at 08.30 GMT, on 1st May, in overcast conditions, in the Clyne River and later on the sand-bar at Blackpill. They kept close together and circled each other continuously, alternately bowing their heads.

I was present on 27th April and observed the display described by RHD, PGA and IFT.

The three occurrences probably refer to the same pair of birds.

R. J. HOWELLS

*Ynys Enlli, 14 Dolgoy Close, West Cross, Swansea, West Glamorgan SA3 5LT*

**Wingbeat rates of Glaucous and Iceland Gulls** Although Iceland Gulls *Larus glaucoides* seem to have a quicker wing action than Glaucous Gulls *L. hyperboreus* when the two are seen together, this is in fact an illusion created by their agility and light build. During a one-month stay in Greenland in 1984, when we saw well over 2,000 Glaucous and over 500 Iceland, we measured the wingbeat speed of each, one of us using a stopwatch and the other a pair of binoculars. Each time that a gull flew directly away from us, we counted the number of beats per 15 seconds (if it altered its flight, the count was rejected). A total of 32 Glaucous was thus timed (12 in head wind, 12 in tail wind, eight in calm) and 20 Iceland (six, seven, seven). The mean numbers of wingbeats per 15 seconds were as follows:

	Head wind	Tail wind	No wind
Glaucous Gull	48.3	45.6	43.7
Iceland Gull	49.6	45.8	50.0

As can be seen, the two species cannot be separated on wing action unless the weather is very calm.

We also examined about 50 specimens of each species at the Zoological Museum, Copenhagen. On Glaucous Gull, the length of the wing (carpal to tip of primaries) was about 75% of total body length; on Iceland, it was 80-85%. We consider this wing:body ratio (when it can be judged) and head size to be the best characters for distinguishing lone individuals.

LARS THOMAS and KARSTEN ANDRESEN

*Zoological Museum dep. 1, Universitetsparken 15, 2100 Copenhagen Ö, Denmark*

**Sandwich Terns feeding over fresh water** Cramp *et al.* (1974) reviewed the literature concerning the food and feeding habits of Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* and concluded that it was a strictly marine feeder. On two separate occasions in May 1972, I observed Sandwich Terns feeding on Lower Lough Erne, Co. Fermanagh, some 25 km from the nearest sea. Normally they fly from the lough, where they breed, to feed in Donegal Bay (Kennedy *et al.* 1954). The food taken by the terns was in both cases the aerial stage of the mayfly *Ephemera danica*, a large mayfly about 25 mm long and an attractive food to a variety of birds. Both terns caught mayflies that were in active flight over the water, rather than newly emerged ones on the surface.

JULIAN GREENWOOD

*Science Department, Stranmillis College, Belfast BT9 5DY*

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Dr E. K. Dunn has commented as follows: 'This is a most interesting observation. So far as I know, there are no published records of Sandwich Terns taking insects in Britain or Ireland, but it has been reported from America (see *BWP* 4: 54). I should think that this is fairly exceptional behaviour, but it has an obvious corollary in the opportunistic exploitation of swarms of flying ants by birds which do not normally so indulge.' EDS

**Treecreeper attaching faecal sacs to pole** On 8th June 1983, a colleague, P. J. C. Cheale, told me about the behaviour of a Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* which he and his son had observed about one week previously. While cycling along a country lane near Redhill, Surrey, they saw a Treecreeper flying with something in its bill; it flew from low in a hedgerow, across the lane to a wooden pole carrying electricity supply cables on the opposite side, placed the object against the surface of the wood and flew off, leaving a small white lump attached to the pole. Closer inspection revealed that the object was a faecal sac. This behaviour was repeated several times before the observers departed. On 9th June, I visited the site. It was easily found, as the white spots showed up clearly against the dark pole from a considerable distance. In all, I counted 84 attached sacs; none was below a height of 3 m, and their density increased towards the top of the pole. They were distributed more or less evenly around the pole, except for a bare strip of about one-third of its width running up the eastern side. I saw no Treecreepers during my visit, and no other poles in the lane showed such deposits. It would be interesting to know if this behaviour is normal for Treecreepers, either on trees or elsewhere. D. WASHINGTON

*15 Bond Gardens, Wallington, Surrey SM6 7LW*

We shall welcome details of any similar observations. EDS



# Letter

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**Nests of Sparrowhawk and Kestrel** I looked at the 'Best recent black-and-white bird-photographs' (*Brit. Birds* 77: 250-258) with much admiration, but feel bound to comment on the statement relating to plates 97-99—showing Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* and Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, respectively, at their nests containing young—that 'Both birds are doubtless occupying abandoned nests of Carrion Crows [*Corvus corone*]'. Kestrels do not build a nest, and an old nest of a Carrion Crow is a frequent site (*BWP* 2: 298), so no quibble so far. Sparrowhawks, on the other hand, build a new nest each year (*BWP* 2: 166), only occasionally on the foundation of the old nest of another species (in other words, they lay their eggs only in a nest that they have built). This detail highlights a striking behavioural difference between Accipitridae and Falconidae (*BWP* 2: 281). **ROBIN PRYTHERCH**  
23 Caledonia Place, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4DL

We do apologise for this error, which was also drawn to our attention by M. J. Cowlard and G. des Forges. EDS

## Announcements

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**Front cover designs for sale** The original unframed drawings of the pictures on the front cover of *BB* are for sale each month in a postal auction. The pictures are usually 1½ or two times the published size. These sales help not only the artists, but also *BB*, since the artists donate 20% to the journal. It is also a way for *BB* readers to acquire—for themselves or as a present for a friend—top-class bird art at very reasonable prices. During the past year, successful postal bids have ranged from £20 to £126; the average has been £56. Why not send in your bid each month? If you are successful (if your bid is the highest, and it exceeds the artist's reserve price), you will be asked to pay the sum you bid, plus £1.50 for postage and packing. Send your name, address and telephone number and your bid (no money at this stage), to arrive before the last day of the month, to Cover Bid, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

**Custom-printed, personal 'British Birds' indexes 1946-85** The cumulative index of all papers, notes, letters and photographs appearing in *British Birds* since 1946 (*Brit. Birds* 77: 29; 78: 55-56) has been revised to include 1985, and this up-to-date version is now available to subscribers. The index is held on a micro-computer and, because of the flexibility which this offers, it is possible to provide indexes relating to individual species or groups of species as well as for a wide range of different subjects. The latter consist of: identification, habitat, distribution and status, mortality, migration, food and feeding, behaviour, voice, breeding biology, physiology, classification, and photographs. Thus, listings can be produced of, for example, all behaviour notes, or of all entries on seabirds, or on the

distribution and migration of the Kestrel, or any other combination of species and subjects, and for any or all years from 1946 to 1985.

The index has been compiled from the comprehensive indexes published with each volume. It has been restricted to birds (i.e. not authors' names, book reviews, etc.), and nor does it include entries from regularly recurring features, such as the annual reports on rarities, ringing, and rare breeding birds, nor 'European news' or 'Recent reports', as these can be located readily in each volume. It does, however, include all photographs from these features. It also includes all entries for species mentioned in, for example, papers on the birds of a particular area. Where an entry relates to more than one of the subjects given above (e.g. on the identification of a species illustrated with photographs), it will appear in an index of identification entries, as well as in one of all photographs, though only the once if both subjects are combined.

It is necessary to make a small charge for the indexes to cover such costs as paper, computer entry, and operation. Indexes will be provided on fan-fold computer paper with approximately 45 entries per page, and be charged at the rate of 3p per page, plus postage. It is estimated that the entire cumulative index since 1946 runs to some 19,000 entries, so taking up about 450 pages. Indexes are normally supplied in alphabetical order of English names. Indexes in systematic order (again using English names) can be supplied, but, because of the extra work involved in their production, at 4p (instead of the usual 3p) per page.

Subscribers who would like an index (or indexes) are invited to write, setting out their requirements. These should include the run of years required, the species or groups of species, and the subjects. Please do not send any money with your order: you will be invoiced. If wanted, an indication of the size of the index asked for can be supplied before it is printed. Orders or enquiries should be sent not to the editorial office, but to Dr Malcolm Ogilvie, Wildfowl Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucester GL2 7BT.

**Identification Notes Panel** We are pleased to announce that A. R. Dean has accepted our invitation to join the Identification Notes Panel.

**Bird Photograph of the Year** This annual competition will again be run by *British Birds* and sponsored by Matthew Gloag & Son Ltd, proprietors of 'The Famous Grouse' Scotch whisky. The rules are as follows:

Up to three colour transparencies, each taken during 1985, may be submitted by each photographer. They will be judged not only on technical excellence, but also on originality and scientific interest, and aesthetic appeal and artistic composition. Preference will be given to photographs taken in Britain and Ireland, but those of species on the British and Irish list taken elsewhere are also eligible. Photographs must not have been submitted for publication elsewhere (though, of course, the copyright remains with the photographer and use subsequent to publication in *British Birds* is unrestricted). The photographs by winner and runners-up may be used at the discretion of the judges in promoting *British Birds* or the competition. A brief account (not more than 200 words) should

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be enclosed with each, giving the circumstances in which obtained, the method used, technical details (focal length of lens and make of camera and film), locality, date and photographer's name and address. Transparencies will be returned only if accompanied by a suitable SAE. Entries are accepted only on the above conditions.

The judging panel will consist of Dr R. J. Chandler, Eric Hosking, Dr J. T. R. Sharrock and Don Smith.

Past winners of this competition have been Michael C. Wilkes (1977), Peter Lowes (1978), Dr Edmund C. Fellowes (1979), Don Smith (1980), Richard T. Mills (1981), Dennis Coutts (1982), David M. Cottridge (1983), John Lawton Roberts (1984) and C. R. Knights (1985). The 1986 award (cheque for £100 and engraved Red Grouse trophy) will be presented to the winning photographer at a Press Reception in London. The runners-up will be welcome to attend the award presentation.

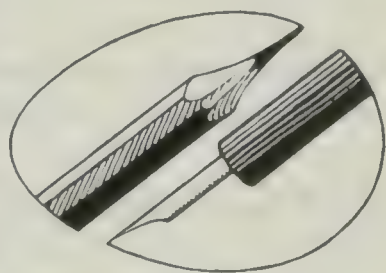
The closing date for entries is 31st January 1986. Transparencies should be clearly marked 'Bird Photograph of the Year' and sent to the editorial office at Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

**Best recent black-and-white bird-photographs** The closing date for submission of prints for the twenty-seventh annual selection is 31st January 1986. Photographers may submit as many black-and-white prints as they wish.

The following details should be written on the back of each print: photographer's name and address, species, county (or country, if taken abroad), month, year, and technical details, such as make and size of camera, make and focal length of lens, type of film material, exposure and approximate distance from the subject. Prints will be retained in the editorial office as part of the reference collection and for possible use in the journal unless a request for return is noted on the back of each print and a suitable stamped addressed envelope is supplied.

Entries should be addressed to 'Best recent work', Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

**Bird Illustrator of the Year** Amateur and professional artists are invited to submit four line-drawings suitable for reproduction in *British Birds* (pen-and-ink or scraperboard, but not pencil or wash). The subjects should be birds recorded in the West Palearctic (Europe, North Africa and the Middle East). Exact size is important: drawings should be the following sizes (width  $\times$  depth in cm): (a)  $18.6 \times 20.8$ , (b)  $16.35 \times 6.9$  and (c)  $7.95 \times 6.0$ , for publication at two-thirds of those dimensions (the largest drawings (a) may, if preferred, be submitted at  $24.8 \times 27.7$ , for publication at half-size). Each set of four drawings must include at least one each of a, b and c. Entries will be judged as sets. Drawings based on published photographs or drawings are ineligible. The announcements of the previous winners (*Brit. Birds* 72: 403-409; 73: 380-384; 74: 275-278; 75: 304-308; 76: 288-291; 77: 283-288; 78: 317-322) included suggestions intended to help future entrants. Entries need not be mounted, but should have a generous 'handling margin' around each drawing.



The judging panel will consist of Robert Gillmor, Keith Shackleton and Dr J. T. R. Sharrock.

The winner will receive £100 and an inscribed salver, and the two runners-up will receive £40 and £25. All three artists will also be invited to attend the award presentation at a Press Reception at The Mall Galleries in London, where a selection of the drawings will be on display. Artists whose work is displayed will also be welcome to attend the reception, which in previous years has provided a very happy occasion for meeting many of our top bird artists. The winners' entries will also be displayed in the annual exhibition of the Society of Wildlife Artists at The Mall Galleries. Previous winners have been Crispin Fisher (1979), Norman Arlott (1980 and 1981), Alan Harris (1982), Martin Woodcock (1983), Bruce Pearson (1984) and Ian Lewington (1985). The winners of 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' and 'The Richard Richardson Award' will also have the opportunity to have their work displayed in a special two-man exhibition at the Stevenage Leisure Centre for a period in the autumn or winter.

Entries will remain the copyright of the artists, but are accepted on the understanding that they may be reproduced free in, or on the cover of, or for the promotion of *British Birds*. If accompanied by a suitable stamped addressed envelope, all drawings will be returned to the artists, but any selected for possible use by *British Birds* may be retained for up to 12 months after the award presentation. Each drawing must be marked clearly on the back with the artist's name and address (and date of birth if aged under 21, see 'The Richard Richardson Award', below), the identity of the species, and any other relevant information about the illustration.

The closing date will be 14th March 1986; the set of four drawings should be sent to 'Bird Illustrator of the Year', Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

**The Richard Richardson Award** To encourage young, up-and-coming bird artists, a special award (a cheque and a book to the total value of £60) will be presented for the best work submitted for the 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' competition (see above) by an artist aged under 21 years on 14th March 1986. The winner's entries will be displayed in the annual exhibition of the Society of Wildlife Artists at The Mall Galleries. This award is in memory of the famous Norfolk ornithologist and bird-artist, the late R. A. Richardson. The rules for entry are exactly the same as for 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' and entries by persons under 21 will automatically be considered for both awards.

**'Colombia', and 'India & Pakistan' books** The publishers have informed us that *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia* by Hilty, Brown & Tudor, expected in autumn 1985, will not be published until March 1986; and that the compact edition of *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan* by Ali & Ripley (currently out of print) is expected to be available again in June 1986.



**Special Offer Subscription Scheme** Members\* of the following bird clubs and societies are currently eligible for reduced subscription rates to *British Birds*:

American Birding Association Inc.	Manchester Ornithological Society
Amersham & District Orn. Soc.	Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Trust
Army Birdwatching Society	Norfolk Ornithologists' Association
Banbury Ornithological Society	Northamptonshire Bird Club
Bardsey Bird Observatory	Northern Ireland Ornithologists' Club
Bedfordshire Natural History Society	Northumberland & Tyneside Bird Club
Bristol Ornithological Club	Oxford Ornithological Society
British Ornithologists' Union	Perthshire Soc. of Nat. Sci.
British Trust for Ornithology	Portland Bird Observatory
Buckinghamshire Bird Club	Reading Ornithological Club
Cambrian Ornithological Society	Rotherham & District Orn. Soc.
Cambridge Bird Club	Royal Air Force Orn. Soc.
Cape Clear Bird Observatory	Royal Australian Ornithologists' Union
Chester & District Orn. Soc.	Royal Naval Birdwatching Society
Christchurch Harbour Orn. Group	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Cornwall Bird-Watching & Preservation Soc.	Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory
Cumbria Association of Nat. Hist. Socs.	Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Derbyshire Ornithological Society	Sheffield Bird Study Group
Devon Bird Watching & Preservation Soc.	Shetland Bird Club
Dorset Nat. Hist. & Arch. Soc.	Shropshire Ornithological Society
Dungeness Bird Observatory	Société Jersiaise
Essex Birdwatching & Preservation Soc.	Somerset Ornithological Society
Finland, Association of Ornithological Socs.	Stichting Dutch Birding Association
Gloucestershire Naturalists' Society	Suffolk Ornithological Group
Gwent Ornithological Society	Surbiton & District Birdwatching Society
Hampshire Ornithological Society	Surrey Bird Club
Herefordshire Ornithological Club	Sussex Ornithological Society
Hertfordshire Natural History Society	Sveriges Ornitologiska Förening
Huntingdonshire Fauna & Flora Soc.	Teesmouth Bird Club
Irish Wildbird Conservancy	Trent Valley Bird Watchers
Isle of Wight Nat. Hist. & Arch. Soc.	Wakefield Nat. Soc.
Israeli Nature Reserves Authority	West Midland Bird Club
Kent Ornithological Society	West Wales Trust for Nature Conservation
Lancaster & District Bird Watching Soc.	Wildfowl Trust
Leeds Birdwatchers' Club	Wiltshire Ornithological Society
Leicestershire & Rutland Orn. Soc.	York Naturalists' Union
Lincolnshire Bird Club	York Ornithological Club
Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union	Young Ornithologists' Club (aged 11-18)
London Natural History Society	All holders of a current UK ringing permit

\*Libraries, reading circles, universities and other institutions are not eligible.

We do encourage birdwatchers to join their local society or club and to support and participate in the surveys and other fieldwork organised by national as well as local bird organisations.

We regret that members of the following organisations are no longer eligible for a reduced subscription rate to *British Birds*, the clubs or societies having either (1) voluntarily withdrawn from our scheme, or (2) failed to reply to our letters and not distributed our subscription leaflets to their members.

Readers of *American Birds*

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Cardiff Naturalists' Society  
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Filey Brigg Orn. Group  
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Leigh Ornithological Society  
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We limit the number of participants in our Special Offer Subscription Scheme, but applications from clubs or societies to join (or rejoin) should be made to Erika Sharrock, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

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**Please help us to help you** (1) The income from books ordered through 'British BirdShop' adds extra pages and extra photographs to every issue of *British Birds*. Please have a look at our list each month, and order your books by using the cut-out form. By doing so, every *BB* subscriber will get better value for money.

(2) Extra subscriptions also enable us to provide a better journal, to everyone's benefit. If you know of someone whom you think may be a potential subscriber (perhaps they already read *BB* by borrowing your copy!), please let us know their name and address so that we can send them a free sample copy and subscription form.

(3) If you have a subscription/distribution/delivery query, please *write* (to Mrs Erika Sharrock, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ). Please do not telephone, as this interrupts and takes time away from Erika's working day.

Our aim is to give you the best possible, scientifically accurate yet readable magazine, and to produce it and despatch it promptly and efficiently every month. Your help is much appreciated.

## News and comment

*Robin Prytherch and Mike Everett*

**Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'**

**Bobby Tulloch** After nearly 22 years' service, Bobby Tulloch has retired from the staff of the RSPB. Many will remember him as 'the man who found the Snowy Owls' nest'—but that was just one event in a score of years in which Bobby has given sterling service to ornithology and bird conservation in his native Shetland. Many more will recall his bird knowledge, his incredible fund of stories, his musicianship, his marvellous photographs and his brilliant lectures—none of which is lost to us, since this is not an obituary notice and we feel sure that he will be just as much a part of the Shetland scene as ever. Our best wishes go to this well-rounded character in his retirement.

**£1m Audubon** The most expensive bird book in the world, John James Audubon's *Birds of America*, a copy of which was purchased by New York City in 1850 for \$1,000, was sold in October for £1,227,764 (*The Times*, 21st October 1985). The purchase in 1850 of this particular copy was made partly to help the old artist, then blind

(and in the last year of his life), but also to pay tribute to his genius. This time, the 435 large plates were sold separately, the birds of prey and seabirds going for exceptionally high prices, but the most expensive plate, at £24,529, was of the now extinct Carolina Parakeet.

**Barn Owls for London?** We read with some misgivings the report that five young Barn Owls *Tyto alba* have been released in London in a joint Greater London Council/Wildlife Hospital Trust project (*The Guardian*, 5th June 1985). Barn Owls have not been breeding regularly in the London area for over ten years, but what chance do those young birds have of improving that? Do we know why they disappeared in the first place? The present situation concerning Barn Owls nationwide is very complex; it cannot be less so in London. Let us hope that some of those chicks survive to breed, but will we, and they, have gained unless we know why?



**Vultures have friends in Spain** The establishment of the 41,120-ha Sierra de Grazalema Nature Park in the northwest of Cadiz and Malaga Provinces, Spain, includes a large population of Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus*. The Park also has many Spanish ibex *Capra pyrenaica* and a 300-ha tract of the rare Spanish fir *Abies pinsapo*. The population of Black Vultures *Aegypius monachus* in Andalusia is also being helped. 'Andalus', a nature conservancy association, has succeeded in stopping the planting of gums *Eucalyptus* that was threatening critical habitat. Andalus has also decided to purchase the Finca Estate, which is at the heart of the vultures' breeding area (*Oryx* 19 (4): 239).

**Egg thieves pay the price** Two Germans who were found in possession of eight Gyr-falcon *Falco rusticolus* eggs received suspended prison sentences and fines totalling £11,000 plus £990 costs in Iceland. The German husband and wife team had equipment for keeping the eggs warm, climbing gear and maps of Iceland marked with many Gyr-falcon nest sites (*Birds* 10 (6): 11). We support Richard Porter, head of the RSPB Species Protection Department, in his plea that similar high fines will be made in future prosecutions throughout the Western World, where trade in birds of prey and their eggs is apparently on the increase. The news on this front is not usually so good, as the following indicates . . .

**Belgium gives falconers the 'O.K.'** Earlier this year, a Ministerial Order issued in the Walloon region of Belgium made it legal for falconers to take young birds of prey from their nests (*Oryx* 19 (4): 239). This astonishing move can only be considered as a retrograde step, especially when responsible falconers and conservationists are working towards captive breeding as a source of supply. It also runs counter to all international regulations protecting birds of prey.

**'Scottish Forestry and Birds'** This was the theme of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club's 38th annual conference, held at North Berwick during 1st-3rd November 1985. It is likely to be remembered, by those who attended, for many years to come. It should not detract from the excellent presentations made by Dr Derek Langslow (NCC), Roderick Leslie (Forestry Commission) and David

Minns (RSPB) to say that Ronald Rose (Economic Forestry Group) stole the session, the day, and the conference. Blunt, candid, indeed downright rude at times, he made it abundantly clear that he detests 'blanket forestry' as much as does any ornithologist, yet has no time for effete naturalists either. He, and his organisation, are in forestry to make money. Unhesitatingly, however, he made it plain that good management, aimed at extra profit for the forest owner, is also very beneficial to wildlife. No blanket conifer forest for him: open areas (for deer to graze and be culled, rather than become a pest; for owls to nest and feed, on the voles and mice that would destroy young trees) and deciduous patches and strips (to encourage the insectivorous birds that keep insect pests under control). I have simplified his story, of course, but it was a revelation to hear a very hard-headed businessman stress again and again (and show with slides of his own superb forests) that what benefits wildlife species-diversity is profitable to the timber producer. Let's hope that his message—presented humorously as well as forcibly—reaches the ears of those who enter forestry solely to make money and who do not share his love of and care for the countryside and its wildlife.

The Sunday scientific session, with Dr Jeff Watson on Golden Eagles, Martin Cook on his tit studies, and Dr Stephanie Tyler on Welsh Dippers and acid water, showed important current research in progress; it was appreciated by an unusually large audience, including those who had survived the activities surrounding a memorable four-piece band the previous night (those there will know what I mean).

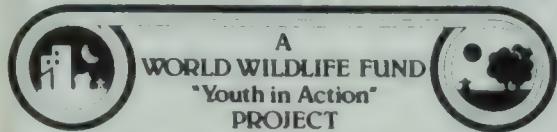
The usual *BB* mystery photographs competition was held at the SOC's invitation, and attracted a lot of attention and exactly 50 entries. All five photographs were correctly identified by only three participants: Keith Brockie, Tom Dougall (who won the champagne in the draw) and Bernard Zonfrillo.

Another discovery was made at this conference. Everyone's name badge carried a Crested Tit logo (the symbol of the SOC), but some logos were large and some were small. It was only after a few drinks in the bar that it was realised that the big tits were the SOC Council Members. We'll know next time!

And there *will* be a next time. In its superb setting on the Firth of Forth, with the Bass Rock and the Isle of May in view from most windows, and Purple Sandpipers and Eiders

a golf-drive away from the hotel, with the traditional Scottish friendliness, with unobtrusive yet immaculate organisation by John Davies and his team, and with a relaxed but valuable programme of lectures, the SOC conference is *always* a memorable experience. (JTRS)

## KODAK CONSERVATION AWARDS



The winners of the top 1985 award were pupils from the Healey County Primary School in Rochdale, Lancashire, who constructed a pond to replace one being filled in by construction work. Well done to them! It was clearly good fun, too (plate 46). Congratulations also, not only to the WWF for running this competition, in which over 50,000 young people have taken part, planting 75,000 trees and creating new wildlife habitats in the process, but also to Kodak for sponsoring the scheme for three years.

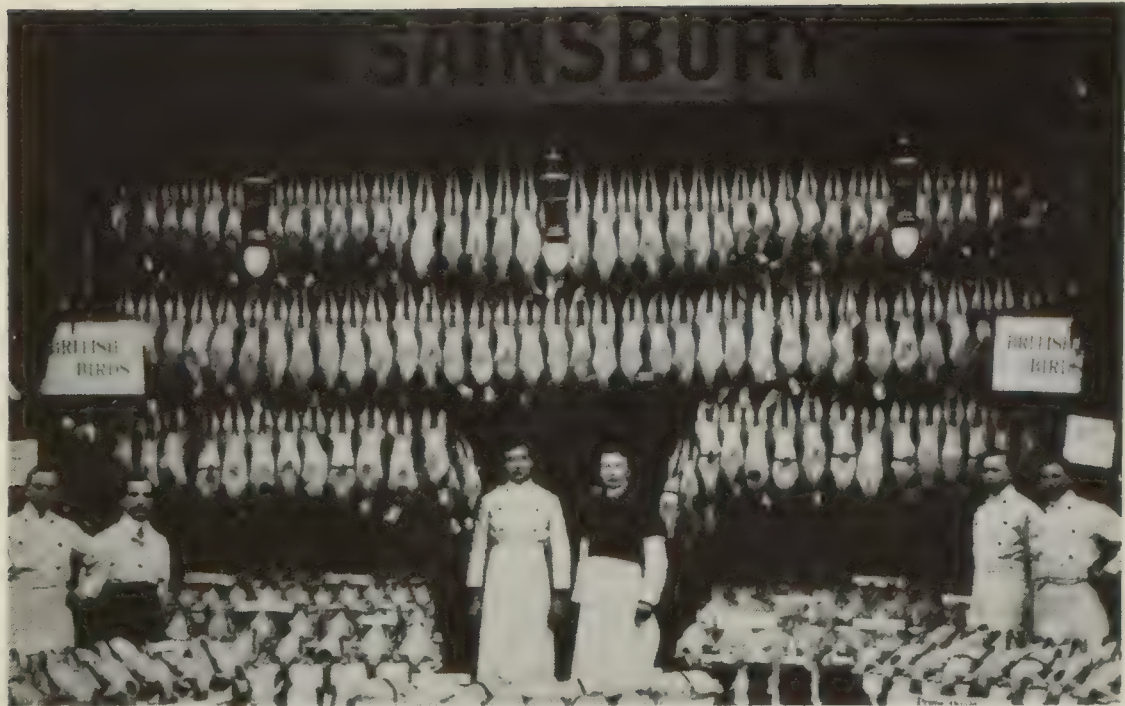
The Awards were presented on 29th October at the Barbican Centre, London, with a total of £10,000 being awarded to 50 projects chosen from the hundreds undertaken, individual prizes ranging from £100 up to the top prize of £1,000. The awards were presented by Sir David Attenborough, Sir Peter Scott, Anneka Rice and Lenny Henry. Anyone (especially schoolteachers and youth leaders) requiring information on the 1986 competition should write to Patricia Spanner, World Wildlife Fund, Panda House, 11-13 Ockford Road, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1QU.

**Mystery photographs winner** The friendly co-operation between the BTO and *BB* has resulted in our mystery photographs display board appearing at several conferences lately. The competition at the joint BTO/Leicestershire & Rutland Ornithological Society conference at Leicester Polytechnic on 26th October 1985 was run for *BB* by Keith Allsopp. The winner of the traditional bottle of champagne, with the only all-correct entry, was David Hodson.

46. Kodak Conservation Awards: local fireman gives assistance to pupil of Healey County Primary School during filling of newly constructed pond, the prize-winning project







47. BB's 1920s advertising campaign?

**The good old days** Ray O'Reilly has sent us this photograph (plate 47), showing, he suggests, our successful advertising campaign of the 1920s.

**'The Twitcher'** One viewpoint, published in the *Yorkshire Post* of 9th September 1985, has been sent to us by M. J. Warrington:

*A BLUE tit isn't worth a look.  
The same goes for a crow or rook.  
Grey Wagtails don't appeal to me.  
The only birds I want to see  
Are those I haven't seen before.  
All other species are a bore.  
It didn't grieve me when I missed  
That osprey. For it's on my list.  
Behaviour, beauty, diet, song,  
Not one of these can make me long  
To stay and watch, I get my kick  
From simply adding one more tick.*

Godfrey Priestley

(By courtesy of the *Yorkshire Post*)

**Magnusson for the birds** The new President of the RSPB is Magnus Magnusson, well-known author and quizmaster for BBC tv's *Mastermind*. As a schoolboy, Magnus Magnusson won an RSPB medal for an essay on the mating habits of Blackbirds, and, more recently among his honours, the appropriately named Icelandic 'Order of the Falcons'.

**'Code of Conduct for Birdwatchers'** This leaflet, produced after consultation between the BTO, the BOU, the RSPB, the SOC, the Wildfowl Trust and BB, has just been

reprinted. Anyone can obtain a free copy by sending their name and address and a first class stamp to Dept. 127, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

**All-Ireland Conference** This year's All-Ireland Conference on Bird Conservation will be held at the Sligo Park Hotel in Sligo during 28th February to 2nd March. Details from IWC, Southview, Church Road, Greystones, Co. Wicklow, Ireland.

**Smile please** A trio of amusing items to finish off with. First, from Stephen Moss, who sent in a cutting from the *Staines and Ashford Leader* for 12th September 1985, which reported 'A rare sighting of arctic skewers on Staines Reservoir . . .' He was not able to confirm the identification, but had his suspicions that they were misidentified deep-frozen kebabs!

Secondly, Derek Goodwin's cutting, from *The Daily Express* of 17th September 1985, concerned headmaster Ray Honeyford's first day back at school. It contained this sentence: 'Some parents took children home when they saw the crow at the gates but more than half the 550 pupils went in.' Derek's only comment: 'Anti-corvid prejudice!'

Finally, we spotted an astonishing entry in *Hobby* 85 (the Wiltshire Bird Report for 1984): 'Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* One found wandering amongst chickens in a large garden at Woodfalls 3 Sept. Subsequently released at Mudeford in Dorset where it flew strongly out to sea.'



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*Magnusson*

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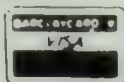
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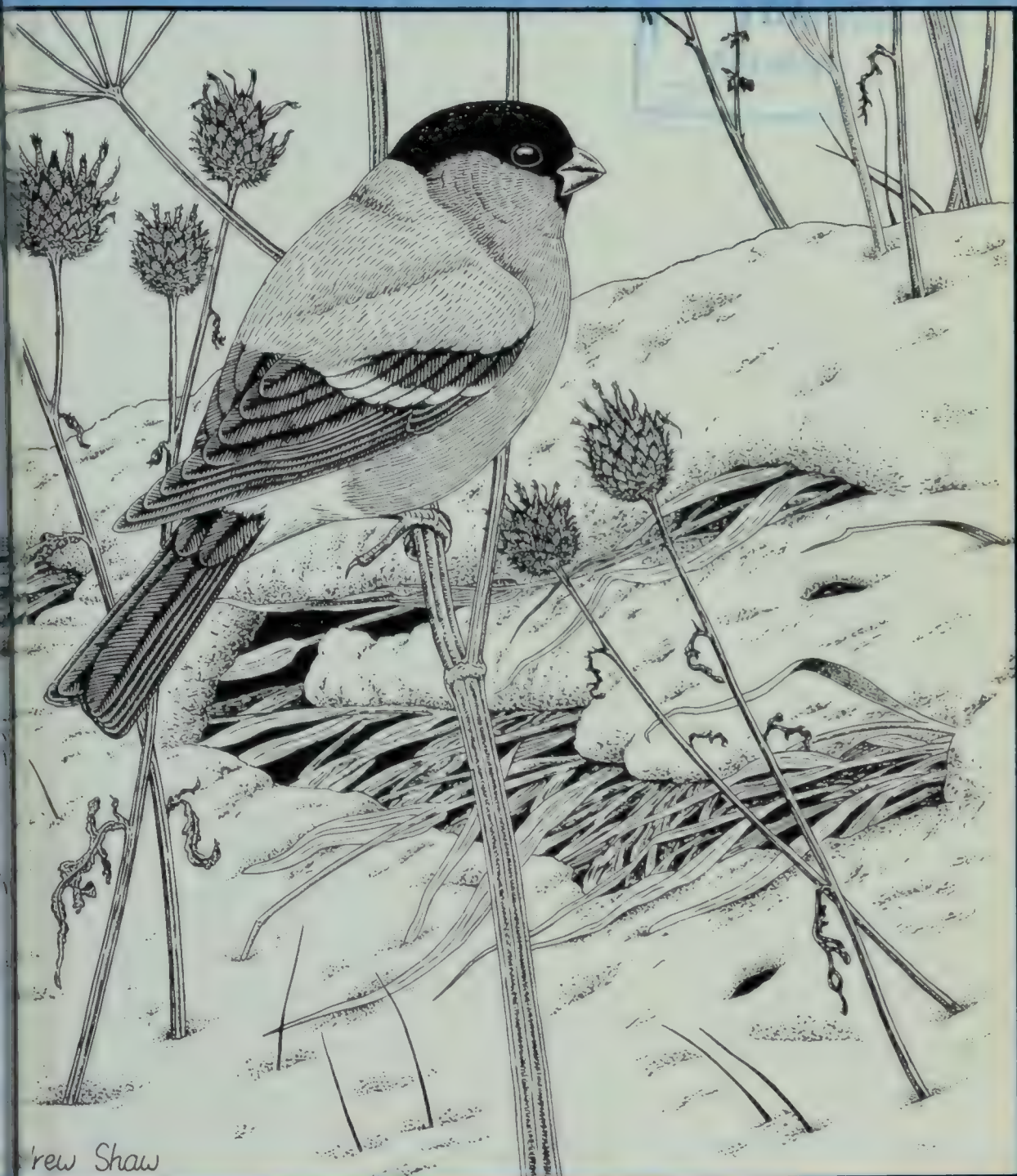
**Line-drawings:** 1 Pallas's Warblers (*Nik Borrow*); 5 Short-billed Dowitcher (*David Daly*); 10 Blackpoll Warbler (*David Daly*); 12 Richard's Pipit (*S. C. Harrap*); 14 Woodchat Shrike (*A. M. Stoddart*); 17 Northern Parula (*Colin Bradshaw*) and Hawfinch (*D. A. Thelwell*); 18 Buzzards (*D. A. Thelwell*); 28 Little Shearwater (*Norman Arlott*).

**Front cover:** Golden Plovers and a Lapwing in a snow blizzard (*John Davis*): the original drawing of this month's cover is for sale in a postal auction (see page 44 for procedure)

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# British Birds

Volume 79 Number 2 February 1986



**Rare breeding birds in the UK in 1983**

**Mystery photographs**

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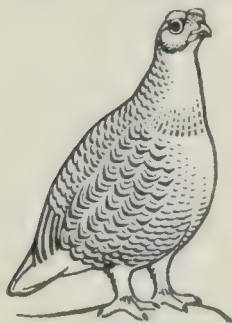
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*Publishing Manager,  
Production & Promotion*  
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*Circulation Manager*  
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*Design*  
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*Papers, notes, letters, drawings & photographs for publication* **Dr J. T. R. Sharrock**, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK43 3NJ

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*Advertising* **Mrs Sandra Barnes**, BB Advertising, c/o Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK43 3NJ. *Phone:* Tiptree (0621) 815085

*Bird news for 'Recent reports'* **Ian Dawson & Keith Allsopp**, c/o RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL. *Phone* (outside office hours): Huntingdon (0480) 214186

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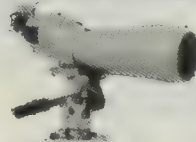
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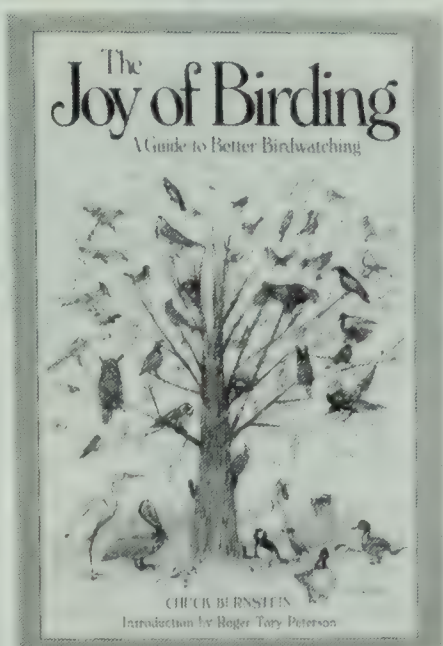
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# British Birds

VOLUME 79 NUMBER 2 FEBRUARY 1986



## Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 1983

*Compiled by Robert Spencer and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel*

**T**he typescript of a report on rare breeding birds in 1983 was completed as long ago as December 1984. It followed the pattern of its predecessors (e.g. that for 1982, *Brit. Birds* 78: 69-92) and could have been in print a few months later. Readers may be interested to know why this did not happen, for it could have a bearing on the presentation of future reports.

If the system were working to perfection, some six to nine months after the end of each breeding season, there would pass into the Panel's safe custody full details of every rare breeding bird in the United Kingdom. Some six months later, the Panel would publish a report which would give



readers all the information they needed to take an intelligent interest in the progress or decline of each species, and which would accomplish this without revealing information likely to be helpful to that small—but possibly growing—corps of people who put their selfish interests before the well-being of the birds.

In reality, we all have our human imperfections so that the ideal is not achieved. We are, for example, still (in October 1985) awaiting 1983 data from some counties, and know that we have not yet got them because the people concerned carry heavy loads of voluntary ornithological duties. Whenever the records come, no matter how late, they are still invaluable from an archive point of view, so we shall be grateful for them. If, however, one is trying to monitor the annual breeding performance of our rarer and more vulnerable species (as our country is required to do as a member of the EEC), long delays are, at best, frustrating, and at worst could prevent the recognition of a critical situation until it was too late to attempt any conservation measures.

The main conservation reasons for collecting information on rare breeding birds on a national basis are:

1. Population changes can be identified and, if necessary, amendments made to legislation (e.g. adding species to Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act or to Annex 1 of the EEC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds).
2. Changes in status can assist conservation bodies with determining priorities (e.g. reserve acquisitions) and also enable them to give helpful advice to other organisations and individuals who similarly may need to determine priorities and action.
3. Changes in status can alert ornithological, conservation and research bodies to the need for detailed surveys, and ecological studies.
4. The NCC can assess, more accurately, the implications of granting licences for photography and scientific nest visits; it can also determine the need for regional considerations in this respect.

Also, if site details are given:

5. Vulnerable sites can be identified where some form of nest protection might enhance the species' chances of success; also, advice to landowners can be given in cases where damaging practices might destroy a nest.
6. SSSI and nature reserve boundaries and habitat management instructions might, as a result of the presence of a rare breeding bird, require modification.
7. New SSSIs can be considered, so enabling statutory measures to be introduced to protect the habitat (and thus the species).

Whilst, to the best of our knowledge, the work of the Panel is not thought to be controversial, some observers and some recorders certainly regard the Panel's published reports in a critical light. Over a period of more than 12 months during 1984 and 1985, we have been seeking the frank opinions of county recorders and now have many letters to guide us. It would be fair to claim that the majority believes that the Panel should be able to draw upon the data in the files for conservation purposes (the original aim was to set up an archive) and that the Panel's published report is about right. A small minority, however, considers that the report has been unnecessarily secretive, whilst a rather larger number of county recorders (but still a minority) fears that it has revealed too much information. So, partly because it was too incomplete and partly in the hope that we might come up with something more widely acceptable, the draft report mentioned in the

opening paragraph was scrapped.

We need a format which contrives to reassure those who worry about security and yet is educational in the best sense of the word. To strike the right balance between these potentially conflicting requirements may prove impossible, but we have tried, and we hope that this revised version will be judged a step in the right direction. The reactions of county recorders and of readers will help to determine whether it is a once-only experiment or, broadly speaking, the basis of a pattern for several years to come.

In our correspondence from recorders, some of the most thoughtful criticism has been directed towards our method of avoiding naming counties by giving them alphabetical letters. This, it has been argued, is a direct challenge to try to crack the code; and it may be that there is some truth in the claim, bearing in mind that over a thousand people took up the challenge of *The 'British Birds' Mystery Photographs Book*. True or not, in this report we have abandoned the system and have introduced in its place—after sounding opinion—an hierarchical structure: county, region, country and United Kingdom. We continue to name counties where we have been authorised by the relevant recorder to do so (although, in a few cases, we have been more cautious and opted for a region). A region, in this context, is a group of neighbouring counties (generally at least seven). It would have been possible to devise our own set of groupings, but it seemed sensible to make use of a pre-existing one, and we chose that drawn up in the 1960s by the European Committee for Bird Ringing. No grouping would be entirely free from objection, but we consider the Euring one well suited to our purpose. It is as follows:

**Northern Ireland** Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, Tyrone

**England, SW** Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Isles of Scilly, Somerset, Wiltshire

**England, SE** Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Greater London, Hertfordshire, Kent, Middlesex, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Sussex (East and West).

**England, E** Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Lincolnshire and South Humberside, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Suffolk

**England, Central** Derbyshire, Herefordshire, Leicestershire (with Rutland), Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire (West Midlands, in the new county structure), Worcestershire

**England, N** Cheshire, Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Greater Manchester, Isle of Man, Lancashire, Merseyside, North Humberside, Tyne & Wear, Yorkshire (North, South and West)

**Wales** All present-day counties (i.e. includes the former Monmouth)

**Scotland, S** The former counties of Ayrshire, Berwickshire, Dumfriesshire, Kircudbrightshire, Lanarkshire, Lothian (East, Mid and West), Peeblesshire, Renfrewshire, Roxburghshire, Selkirkshire, Wigtownshire

**Scotland, Mid** Aberdeenshire, Angus, Banffshire, Clackmannanshire, Dunbartonshire, Fife, Kincardineshire, Kinross, Moray, Nairn, Perthshire, Stirlingshire

**Scotland, N & W** Argyllshire, Bute, Caithness, Inverness-shire, Orkney, Ross & Cromarty, Shetland, Sutherland, Western Isles (Outer Hebrides)

In place of 'County B', for example, we might now write 'England, SE', meaning that the bird was somewhere in a block of 12 counties. In nearly all cases, the area of land specified will be so large as to thwart even the most dedicated sleuth, but we have the further options of simply saying



'England', 'Scotland', and so on, and it is just conceivable that for even greater security we might write 'Great Britain' or 'United Kingdom'.

The Panel's previous reports have all listed named counties in alphabetical order (a system adopted for most listings). Its disadvantage in this report is that it does not facilitate an appreciation of distribution. For example, under Hobby *Falco subbuteo* in our 1979 report appears the county sequence 'Avon, Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Devon, Dorset, Durham, East Sussex, Gloucestershire . . .', so that the mind might just jump about in its attempt to visualise the distribution. We have in this 1983 report listed all counties by region, and the regions in the order shown above, but alphabetically within each region, for there appears to be no logical sequence of listing within regions which can be applied to all regions.

A third change is the introduction of tabular presentation for a few species, such as Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* and Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*. The system is experimental, but could be developed further, both in the range of data presented and by extension to other of the more widespread rare breeding birds.

Readers will note that for Marsh *Circus aeruginosus* and Montagu's Harriers *C. pygargus* there is an acknowledgment of the valuable contribution made by John Day. For some years, he has been making a detailed survey of the status of these species, corresponding in the process with all the relevant recorders, and often with observers. Since his information was in some cases more detailed than that available to us, we were grateful to receive draft summaries from him. The principle involved is not new, in that Humphrey Sitters has played a major role in piecing together the account of the decline of the Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*, whilst Peter Davis of the Kite Committee has for many years passed us a comprehensive summary of the fortunes of the Red Kite *Milvus milvus*. We hope it may prove possible to establish similar ties with other workers specialising in species which seem not to be adequately covered by our standard reporting procedure.

This report could not have been published without the skill and dedication of the original observers, some of whom spent unnumbered hours in their efforts to prove breeding, obtain evidence of breeding success, and so on. Their contribution completed, it then fell to the county recorders to assemble, transcribe, and sometimes even confirm the data before passing them on to the Panel, and in an ornithologically rich county these tasks can be very considerable. The role of the Panel in the preparation of the report is that of midwife, helping the data into the light of day. To all who have helped, the Panel members express their sincere thanks, coupled with the hopes of continued and extended support.

During 1983, the membership of the Panel was unchanged from 1982, being Dr L. A. Batten, R. H. Dennis, Ian Prestt, Dr J. T. R. Sharrock and Robert Spencer, who succeeded Dr Sharrock as Secretary in the autumn of the year. This report was compiled during the summer of 1985, in which year Richard Porter succeeded Ian Prestt on the Panel and was immediately much involved in the collecting of material and the presentation of this report.

Whilst the work of the Panel is supported, both financially and in other respects, by the NCC, the RSPB, the BTO and *British Birds*, the Panel is autonomous. Its members are appointed as individuals, albeit with a knowledge of, but not directly responsible to, the sponsoring bodies.

## The year 1983

The year was notable for the addition of two species to our list. The first was the Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* present in a Welsh colony of Manx Shearwaters *P. puffinus* (*Brit. Birds* 79: 28-33). The second was the Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*, with two pairs in a northern county, the year before the well-publicised breeding in East Anglia. At this stage, it would be wrong to attach much importance to either event. Sporadic breeding attempts may have novelty value, but seldom contribute meaningfully to our avifauna.

Of much greater significance are those species now declining after relative abundance and those whose small beginnings are apparently prospering. Of the former, the Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* and the Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* offer naught for our comfort, but such declines run counter to the general trend of survival and increase. Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*, Marsh and Montagu's Harriers, Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Redwing *Turdus iliacus*, Cetti's Warbler (despite recent setbacks due to cold winters) and Firecrest all seem to be buoyant or, at the very least, stable. Any reader looking back to our report for 1982 will find a considerable overlap in the list of prospering species then and now, and this lends support to the belief that there is sustained, if slow, increase. There are also slight indications that, after a long period of mere toe-hold presence, both the Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* and the Serin *Serinus serinus* may be becoming more surely established as breeding birds. What happens to them on our shores must be seen as part of the wider pattern of expansion and colonisation which they have been showing in northwestern Europe.

## Systematic list

We have received no relevant 1983 records for the following species:

Great Northern Diver <i>Gavia immer</i>	Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Little Bittern <i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	Spotted Sandpiper <i>Actitis macularia</i>
Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>	Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	Glaucous Gull <i>Larus hyperboreus</i>
Scaup <i>Aythya marila</i>	Bee-eater <i>Merops apiaster</i>
King Eider <i>Somateria spectabilis</i>	Shore Lark <i>Eremophila alpestris</i>
Long-tailed Duck <i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	Citrine Wagtail <i>Motacilla citreola</i>
Smew <i>Mergus albellus</i>	Great Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>
Rough-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo lagopus</i>	Great Grey Shrike <i>Lanius excubitor</i>
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Lapland Bunting <i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>
Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>	



**Red-necked Grebe** *Podiceps grisegena*

Two sites, involving three individuals.

**England, SE** One site: one from 20th February to 12th November.

**Scotland, S** One site: two, sometimes one, in breeding plumage and displaying on several dates between 17th April and 24th June.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	0	1	2	5	2	0	1	3	3	2	2
Pairs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Individuals in summer	0	1	2	5	2	0	1	4	2	2	3

The pair in Scotland may have left as a result of disturbance to the habitat.

**Slavonian Grebe** *Podiceps auritus*

44 sites: 41-79 pairs breeding.

**England, N** One site: pair in breeding plumage on 23rd April.

**Scotland, Mid** Four sites.

**PERTSHIRE** Four sites: (1)-(4) singles at each on dates ranging between 28th March and 31st July, but possibly two individuals at one site on 4th June.

**MORAYSHIRE** One site: three, possibly four, pairs, reared total of three broods.

**Scotland, N & W** 38 sites.

**INVERNESS-SHIRE** 38 sites: (1)-(38) total of 38-70 pairs, rearing total of 29-32 young.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	22	25	23	23	15	18	27	36	35	25	44
Pairs proved breeding	52	58	54	70	42	37	58	53	52	51	41
Pairs possibly breeding	53	63	66	75	51	55	77	80	71	59	79

Many of the pairs in the category 'possibly breeding' were in fact known not to have bred. The sharp increase in the number of sites arises chiefly from extra fieldwork in areas not hitherto covered. Amongst the reasons for failure, observers listed low water levels, sharply rising water levels, and an inflatable power-boat driven over a nest.

**Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*

18 sites: 11-29 pairs breeding.

**England, SE** Three sites, involving two counties: (1) one in breeding plumage on 31st May; one, possibly the same, from 19th to 28th July; (2) single on 30th June; (3) single on 2nd July.

**England, E** Six sites, involving two counties: (1) two, possibly a pair, arrived on 1st August and may have come from suitable site in vicinity, present daily until 19th August, when one left, second left 4th September, but two arrived on 9th September, remaining until at least 12th September; (2) pair on 20th May, three adults from 24th May to 2nd July, displaying, none subsequently; (3) pair displaying on 11th May; (4) pair displaying on 17th May; (5) one on 3rd July, possibly from site 2; (6) one on 6th July, also possibly from site 2.

**England, Central** One site: pair present in May and often going into reeds, but not seen after site flooded by torrential rain on 1st June.

**England, N** Five sites, involving two counties: (1) nine pairs reared total of 33 young; (2) pair on 13th June in breeding plumage, nest material being offered, copulated twice; (3) one in breeding plumage from 24th April to 23rd May; (4) pair moulting from summer to winter

plumage from 31st July to at least 7th August; (5) pair in winter plumage on numerous occasions until 21st December, when only one present.

**Elsewhere in England** One site: two pairs, rearing broods of two and one.

**Wales** One site: adult in breeding plumage from 11th April to 2nd May.

**Scotland, Mid** One site: three pairs, 13th April.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	4	2	4	2	7	6	6	9	7	12	18
Pairs proved breeding	18	15	2	10	11	13	12	11	5	11	11
Pairs possibly breeding	19	18	11	11	16	15	14	21	12	21	29

With 36 young known to have been reared, and substantial increases in both the number of sites and the number of individuals involved, it would appear that the population is in a healthier state than it has been for many years.

### **Black-browed Albatross** *Diomedea melanophris*

One site: one summered with Gannets *Sula bassana*.

**Scotland, N & W** One site.

**SHETLAND** One site: adult in colony from 17th March to 16th September.

This is the twelfth successive year that this individual has summered in this Gannet colony.

### **Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis*

One site: one reported.

**Wales** One site: female identified by call in colony of Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* on 3rd May, but this 'call-only' record was not accepted by the Rarities Committee.

**1981 Wales** One site: male, first noted on 26th June, and visited the colony on most dark nights until 10th July, captured and ringed on 29th June, retrapped on 7th July.

**1982 Wales** One site: male (ringed in 1981) present in colony of Manx Shearwaters on 21st June and most nights until 25th July.

There have been fewer than 60 occurrences of this species in British and Irish waters, none previously relating to individuals attending shearwater colonies, so the records listed here represent a most interesting development. For fuller details see *British Birds* (79: 28-33).

### **Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*

15 sites: 36 or 37 booming males.

**England, SE and E** 13 sites, of which ten were in Norfolk: (1) individual(s) present to 21st May, but no indication of breeding; (2) one present before and after the breeding season; (3) eight booming; (4) three booming; (5) two booming; (6)-(13) singles booming.

**England, N** Two sites.

**LANCASHIRE** Two sites: (1) 11, possibly 12, pairs present; (2) one booming.

Information from one county in 'England, SE and E' is incomplete.

	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	18	17	21	19	16	15	15
Pairs proved breeding	0	2	1	4	1	1	0
Booming males	43	47	51	48	47	35	36-37

It is difficult to obtain proof of breeding for this species.



**Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus*

Four sites: three feral or partly feral pairs, a possibly wild pair and one other individual.

**England, N** One site.

LANCASHIRE One site: wild individual paired with one originating from the Wildfowl Trust collection at Martin Mere and reared one young.

**Scotland, Mid** Three sites.

DUNBARTONSHIRE One site: two feral pairs, both of which eventually deserted.

PERTHSHIRE Two sites: (1) pair summered; (2) one with two Mute Swans *Cygnus olor* on 9th June.

**Black Duck** *Anas rubripes*

Two sites: female mated with male Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* at one, and male mated with female Mallard at second.

**England, SW** One site.

SCILLY One site: female mated with male Mallard and produced three young; hybrids from former years are now merged with the Mallard population.

**Wales** One site.

GWYNEDD One site: male present all year and hybrids seen as follows: three on 3rd February, two on 30th March, three on 20th August, eight on 23rd September and five on 7th December.

**Pintail** *Anas acuta*

20 sites: 12-26 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** One site.

DORSET One site: female with three young: the first breeding record for the county.

**England, SE** Two sites.

ESSEX Two sites: (1) pair on 14th July with nine young about three weeks old; (2) single on 16th July.

**England, E** Four sites.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE Two sites: two or three pairs possibly bred, but extensive flooding prevented close investigation.

NORFOLK One site: male on 18th May.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE One site: pair on 4th May: third successive year that pair seen at the site.

**England, N** Six sites.

CHESHIRE One site: 13, including four adult males, on 10th June, and two males and four females on 25th June: one pair suspected of breeding.

CUMBRIA Five sites: (1) pair, with courtship display on 14th April, female carrying nesting material on 21st April, apparently sitting on 25th April, three two-week-old ducklings in the reeds on 1st July, but not identified specifically; (2) pair with 12 eggs in early June; (3) two immatures on 17th July; (4) female on 25th July; (5) pair on 1st May.

**Scotland, N & W** Eight sites.

INVERNESS-SHIRE One site: pair arrived on 3rd April, female agitated and protecting young on 3rd June.

WESTERN ISLES One site: pair possibly bred.

ORKNEY Six sites: (1) five females showing distraction display on 19th July; (2) nest with seven eggs in early June; (3) female with eight young on 10th May; (4) pair present in May and June; (5) female with seven young on 28th June; (6) pair possibly bred.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	3	7	11	10	15	10	19	15	16	18	21
Pairs proved breeding	3	10	12	6	10	7	10	9	8	7	12
Pairs possibly breeding	5	11	25	16	26	23	41	25	31	32	26

Though small in numbers, the breeding population of this graceful duck is widely spread.

**Garganey** *Anas querquedula*

57 sites: 14-64 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** Three sites.

AVON One site: male present 16th May to 15th July, but no report of female.

CORNWALL One site: pair reared at least two young.

DEVON One site: pair during 1st to 8th April, male on 17th April.

**England, SE** 12 sites.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE Two sites: (1) male on 2nd May, male and female on 15th June; (2) single male on 3rd and 14th June, then up to three in August and five in September, with one remaining to end of year.

ESSEX Four sites: (1) male on 15th June; (2) male on 22nd May; (3) female on 4th June; (4) one on 25th June.

HERTFORDSHIRE One site: pair on 26th and 27th March, pair on 26th May, male on 31st May, pair on 10th June.

KENT Five sites: (1) four individuals including three males on 18th June, but no other records during period 17th May to 18th July; (2) present all summer and one pair bred; (3) present all summer and three pairs bred; (4) present from May to July, one pair rearing five young; (5) five pairs present, broods of three and four seen in late July.

**England, E** 27 sites.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE Four sites: (1) maximum count of 14 males on 18th May and a brood of ten seen on 23rd June, others may have nested; (2) maximum of three males and one female on 16th May, pair present until mid July and probably bred; (3) maximum of four males and one female in May and one male on 1st June; (4) up to two pairs in April and May, last individual on 8th July. There may have been some interchange between sites 3 and 4.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE One site: pair present from 24th March to 13th April in suitable habitat, copulation observed, but did not breed at this site.

NORFOLK 16 sites: (1)-(16) one to five pairs reported from each, and two pairs known to have bred.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE Five sites: (1) pair present during May; (2) pair present on 22nd April, female only on 23rd and 24th April; (3) one with damaged wing from 21st August to 23rd September; (4) male on 27th April; (5) pair present from 10th to 14th May and on 27th June, male and two females on 29th June, one to three individuals present on various dates between 25th July and 17th September.

SUFFOLK One site: one or two pairs reared at least four young.

**England, Central** Two sites.

LEICESTERSHIRE One site: pair reared two out of six young, this being the first breeding record for the county since 1947.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE One site: pair from 24th to 27th April and wandering males to 21st May, then a gap until reappearance on 30th July.

**England, N** 13 sites.

CHESHIRE Three sites: (1) male on 9th April and pair on 17th April; (2) pair on 4th April; (3) pair on 29th April, male on 12th May, subsequently two males in eclipse together with female and four juveniles.

CUMBRIA Three sites: (1) female on 31st August; (2) pair from 29th July to 25th September; (3) female from 29th April to 3rd August.

LANCASHIRE Five sites: (1) pair from 22nd April to 7th May, male on 12th May, pair on 25th June, male or female on several dates in July; (2) one from 8th to 31st May; (3) pair from 12th March to 10th April; (4) pair on 1st June, male on 4th June; (5) pair from 22nd April joined by second male from 2nd May to 22nd May, last seen on 25th May.

NORTHUMBERLAND One site: pair reared young.

YORKSHIRE One site: pair probably bred.

	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	34	48	66	57
Pairs proved breeding	4	8	10	14
Pairs possibly breeding	54	58	94	64

Possibly an average year for this species, but a longer series of records will



be needed before the 1983 data can be seen in true perspective. The importance of the southeastern half of England is clearly demonstrated.

**Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra*

Six sites: 10-85 pairs breeding.

**Ireland, N** One site.

FERMANAGH One site: maximum of 51 breeding pairs with minimum productivity of 45 young from nine broods.

**Scotland, Mid** Three sites.

DUNBARTONSHIRE/STIRLINGSHIRE One site: census on 24th May indicated four pairs and an additional male, no reports of young received.

PERTHSHIRE Two sites: (1) three pairs on 6th May, two pairs on 29th May, pair plus two males and three females on 18th June, female with one young on 20th July; (2) pair on 6th May.

**Scotland, N & W** Two sites.

INVERNESS-SHIRE Two sites: (1) 23 males and 2 females on 18th June, other females assumed to be on nests; (2) three pairs on nearby lochans on 18th June.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	13	13	12	14	13	9	17	10	6	17	6
Pairs proved breeding	4	10	32	22	24	16	98	7	5	14	10
Pairs possibly breeding	133	142	159	159	156	141	128	113	82	112	85

Annual variation in numbers probably tends to reflect variation in the degree of cover more than population fluctuations.

**Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula*

57 sites: 47-57 pairs bred.

**England, SE** One site.

ESSEX One site: female on 17th June.

**England, N** Five sites.

CUMBRIA Five sites: (1) two immature males on 23rd May, female on 2nd June; (2) male on 10th June; (3) female on 10th May; (4) male on 16th July; (5) female on 17th May.

**Wales** One site.

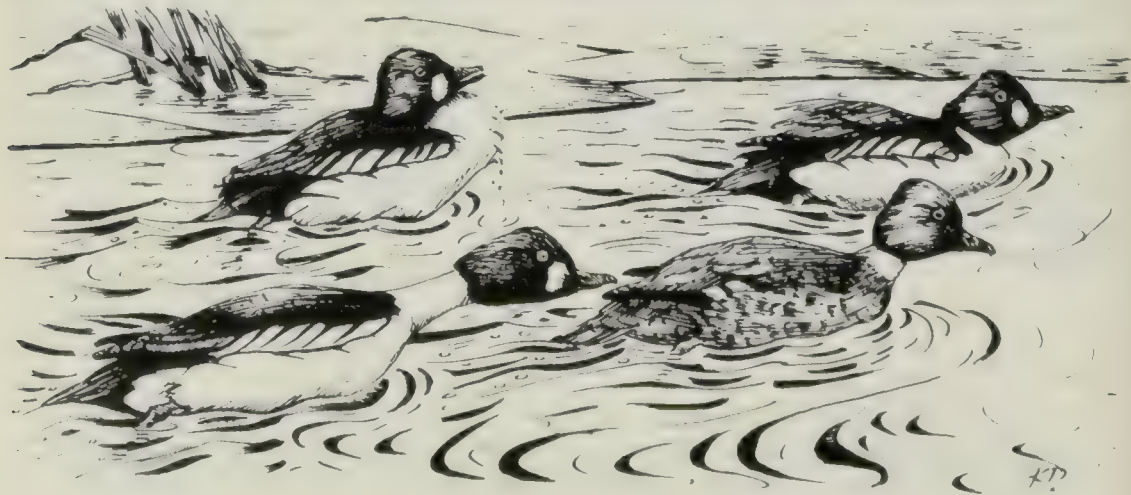
GWYNEDD One site: female present up to 6th July.

**Scotland, S** One site.

BORDERS One site: male on 14th June.

**Scotland, Mid** Two sites.

PERTHSHIRE Two sites: (1) two males and five immature females on 17th June; (2) six adult and two immature males, two adult and three immature females on 18th June.



**Scotland, N & W** Eggs laid in 47 nests: 209 young hatched from 24 clutches, with good survival.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	1	5	3	8	12	18	17	11	13	11	11
Pairs proved breeding	3	3	3	5	6	12	22	26	29	27	47
Pairs possibly breeding	3	7	6	12	14	27	43	37	54	57	56
Young hatched	22	19	10	46	11	40	110	165	286	220	209

The nests in 'Scotland, N & W' have arbitrarily been regarded as one rather than 47 sites: this does not necessarily imply nests in close proximity. The standard warning must be given that the reporting of summering Goldeneyes, although a common practice in English and Welsh counties, is not undertaken systematically at the numerous potential sites in Scotland.

### **Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*

Two sites: 0-2 pairs breeding.

**Great Britain** Two sites, two pairs: (1) pair summered; (2) pair present from second week of May to 27th July was thought not to have bred.

No information is available from a third locality, where the species is known to have bred in recent years.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	1	3	2	7	8	8	3	3	8	2	2
Pairs proved breeding	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	2	1	0
Pairs possibly breeding	1	3	2	7	8	8	3	4	9	2	2

A poor situation for the second consecutive year and one in which the warm dry weather might have been expected to benefit the species.

### **Red Kite** *Milvus milvus*

46 pairs, 33 breeding, 20 successful, rearing 24 young.

**Wales** 46 pairs known; 24 young reared. Of the known pairs, 33 laid eggs. There were 20 successful nests, 16 with broods of one, and four with broods of two. Thirteen other pairs were located, of which 11 built or partly repaired nests, but did not lay. Two pairs apparently did not build. In addition, between 16 and 20 unmated individuals were identified in April, giving a total adult population of 107 or more. Of the known failures, seven clutches failed to hatch after full-term incubation (an unusually high proportion), three nests lost young to natural causes, one clutch was deserted at the egg stage, and two nests failed about hatching time. One egg from a clutch of three was apparently taken by an egg-collector. (The Panel is indebted to Peter Davis and the Kite Committee for this precise and detailed information.)

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Total pairs	26	32	32	36	34	39	42	42	46	47	46
Breeding pairs	26	27	28	29	28	32	30	29	32	38	33
Successful pairs	10	9	15	15	12	13	14	21	18	19	20
Young reared	14	12	24	18	17	22	18	27	21	23	24





### **Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*

29 sites: 71 young reared.

**England, SE** Four sites: (1) pair bred successfully, fledging one young (two eggs failed); (2) female present throughout June; (3) female on 26th June; (4) one on 3rd July.

**England, E** 22 sites.

**NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK** 15 sites: (1)-(15) 26 females and 19 males (one trigamous and five bigamous) reared 67 young, reported brood sizes being three of one, three of two, four of three, six of four, and one of five.

**ELSEWHERE** Seven sites: (1) pair reared three young; (2) pair attempted breeding; (3)-(7) breeding season records, some suggesting continued presence, but no evidence of breeding.

**England, N** One site: immature female on 11th April, immature male on 5th June and 11th-12th June.

**Wales** Two sites: (1) two present regularly during March to May, male nearby on 17th and 26th July, breeding thought not impossible, but no evidence to suggest it; (2) single immature male at suitable breeding site on 1st April.

The national totals of 28 nests and 71 young were the highest this century. Mean fledged brood size was 2.5, slightly better than the 2.38 in the period 1971-82. Three nests failed, two due to disturbance by human beings, the other to unknown causes. Twenty-five nests were in reedbeds, and three in arable crops. The latter three were all successful, offering hope that further expansion will not be halted by lack of large reedbeds. (The Panel gratefully acknowledges the important contribution of John Day in the preparation of this species report.)

1971 1972 1973 1974 1975 1976 1977 1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983

Breeding males	1	2	5	4	5	11	13	14	11	16	17	19	21
Breeding females	1	3	6	5	7	11	15	14	16	20	20	24	28
Fledged young	2	8	17	7	18	27	44	36	38	44	48	59	71
Mean fledged young per nest	2.0	2.7	2.8	1.4	2.6	2.4	2.9	2.6	2.4	2.2	2.0	2.5	2.5

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

**England, SW, SE and E** Eight sites: 6-10 pairs breeding. Six pairs attempted to breed, but three nests failed. Two failures occurred at the egg stage and the third when four young died in the nest. A combination of heavy rain, flattened crops and possibly predation seem to have caused the failures. The three other nests were successful, and broods of two, three and four were reared. At the second of these nests, the female disappeared, leaving four small young; three of them were successfully reared, with human help, from prey brought in by the male. (The Panel is grateful to John Day, who compiled these data.)

Other records received suggest that a maximum of a further four pairs possibly bred.

1973 1974 1975 1976 1977 1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983

Sites	5	3	3	4	2	7	4	8	8	7	8
Pairs proved breeding	2	0	0	3	1	2	2	2	2	3	6
Pairs possibly breeding	5	3	3	5	2	7	4	8	9	8	10
Young reared (minimum)	0	0	0	6	0	3	7	4	4	4	9

The most successful breeding year since records were first compiled nationally by the Panel.

Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

52 sites: 30-52 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** 12 sites: (1)-(6) total of six nests, from which a total of 14 young fledged; (7)-(11) display observed; (12) single, judged to be female.

**England, Central** Five sites: (1) pair breeding; (2)(3) single pairs in established sites; (4) pair displaying; (5) male on 23rd April in vicinity of former breeding site.

**England, N** 23 sites: (1)-(17) single pairs known to have attempted breeding, but nine or ten of these were robbed, three or four deserted, and the female was shot at one; (18)(19) single pairs, but no report of nests being built; (20)-(23) singles in four localities, on 25th May, 8th June, 3rd July, and 28th-31st August.

**Wales** Seven sites: (1)(2) single pairs bred, fledging at least two young between them; (3) nest with eggshells beneath, located in winter; (4) pair heard in summer and nest found in following winter; (5) pair during breeding season; (6)(7) one or two individuals present in March and April.

**Scotland, S** Three sites: (1) pair, seen together or singly, on five dates between 9th April and 22nd May, and soaring together on 26th November; (2) male soaring on 28th April; (3) pair soaring on 16th October.

**Scotland, N & W** Two sites: (1) pair with two eggs, failed due to tree felling; (2) pair reared two young from three eggs.

**1979 Wales** One site: two fledged young seen, nest subsequently found.

**1980 Wales** One site: pair seen in spring and summer.

**1981 Wales** One site: pair seen in spring and summer.

In all, the 30 pairs reported as attempting breeding in 1983 are known to have reared 24 young.



	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Counties	6	10	14	10	15	18	21	21	27	16	15
Sites	12	20	32	28	33	37	37	42	50	39	52
Pairs proved breeding	6	9	5	12	15	14	23	17	15	23	30
Pairs possibly breeding	12	21	34	28	37	40	44	49	52	41	52

The figures in the table suggest a gradual build-up in numbers, but this is partly attributable to increased fieldwork. With eggs or young taken from one-third of the nests, it is clear that human predation is the chief factor limiting the increase and expansion of the population of this fine raptor.

### **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*

30 sites: 24 pairs reared 45 young. Three nests robbed by egg-collectors.

**Scotland, Mid** One site.

PERTSHIRE Loch of Lowes: nest deserted for reasons unknown, and two chicks found dead in nest. A new pair subsequently took over the nest.

**Scotland, N & W** One site.

INVERNESS-SHIRE Loch Garten: pair fledged two young from three eggs.

**Elsewhere in Scotland** 28 pairs: 22 pairs laid eggs and there were 19 successful broods. Of the 20 broods fledging in Scotland, there were four of one, eight of two, and eight of three young. (All data compiled by Roy Dennis on behalf of the RSPB.)

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Pairs	16	14	14	14	20	22	25	25	25	30	30
Successful pairs	10	10	7	10	7	11	16	19	20	21	24
Young reared	21	20	16	20	13	19	30	41	42	45	45

### **Hobby** *Falco subbuteo*

246 sites: 78-255 pairs, rearing at least 104 young.

**England, SW** 34-91 pairs, rearing at least 38 young.

AVON Five sites: (1) many sightings, including one juvenile on 5th and 17th September; (2)-(5) singles on one or more dates.

DEVON One site: pair fledged two young. Information concerning remaining pairs withheld.

DORSET 17 sites: (1)-(17) single pairs, of which 15 reared 24 young; one nest robbed, possibly two.

HAMPSHIRE 42 sites: (1)-(11) single pairs proved to have bred, the only reported brood sizes being one of two and one of three; (12)-(32) total of 21 single pairs probably breeding; (33)-(42) presence in breeding season.

SOMERSET Seven sites: (1) pair bred, but outcome unknown; (2) pair seen on many dates; (3)-(7) records of one, occasionally two, on one or more dates, three of which might possibly indicate attempted breeding.

WILTSHIRE Sixteen sites: (1) pair reared two young; (2) adult and two juveniles seen; (3) pair at nest; (4) pair with one juvenile; (5)(6) single pairs; (7)(8) regular sightings, but known site at 8 apparently not occupied; (9)-(16) single adults seen in suitable habitat during the breeding season, but no indication that pair present.

**England, SE** 37-78 pairs, rearing at least 53 young.

BEDFORDSHIRE One site: pair reared one young.

BERKSHIRE Five sites: (1)-(3) singles on two to five occasions; (4)(5) single individuals carrying prey, on 12th and 29th July respectively.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE 17 sites: (1)-(8) eight single pairs bred successfully, broods of one, two and three being ringed and fledged young seen at five other nests; (9)-(17) breeding regarded as probable; (18)-(26) casual sightings, sometimes on more than one date, during the breeding season.

**ESSEX** Two sites: (1)(2) single pairs, each rearing two young.

**HERTFORDSHIRE** 14 sites: (1) pair with two well-grown young; (2) pair with fledged young; (3) adult carrying food in late August; (4)-(8) singles seen on several dates or two birds together, but no evidence of breeding; (9)-(14) singles seen only once, on dates in June and July.

**KENT** Three sites: (1) pair from May to August and said to have bred; (2) pair in May and June; (3) one individual from April to July.

**SURREY** 20 sites: (1) nest with four young, of which at least two fledged; (2) nest with four eggs from which at least two young fledged; (3) nest with three young, all of which fledged; (4) nest from which three young fledged; (5)(6) nests with three young each, of which some fledged; (7) nest with three eggs from which two young fledged; (8)-(11) nests with two young each, of which some fledged; (12)(13) nests with three eggs, each fledging one young; (14) nest from which at least one young fledged; (15) nest with one egg, producing fledged young; (16)(17) individuals seen and heard calling on more than one occasion in circumstances which implied breeding; (18)(19) individuals on more than one occasion in traditional breeding areas; (20) individual in possible breeding area.

**SUSSEX** Seven sites: (1)-(7) seven single pairs reared total of 11-13 young.

**England, E** 4-66 pairs, rearing at least nine young.

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE** 19 sites: (1) single adults seen on several dates in spring and summer and one juvenile on 8th August: several potential breeding sites in the vicinity; (2)-(19) recorded at





about 18 sites (although late August and September records, including a pair with three young on 15th September, assumed to relate to passage).

**HUNTINGDONSHIRE** One site: single(s) seen on eight dates between 21st April and 28th August.

**LINCOLNSHIRE/SOUTH HUMBERSIDE** Two sites: (1) single(s) seen fairly regularly from 17th June to 29th July and again from 16th to 21st September; (2) adult and juvenile hunting together on 7th September.

**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE** 27 sites: (1) pair fledged three young; (2) pair fledged at least two young; (3) pair fledged three young; (4) pair fledged one young; (5)-(7) immatures seen in September; (8)-(11) pairs present; (12)-(27) singles during summer.

**England, Central** 3-19 pairs, rearing at least four young.

**DERBYSHIRE** One site: pair from 30th April to September.

**HEREFORDSHIRE** One site: single in August.

**LEICESTERSHIRE** Three sites: (1)(2) single pairs each reared two young; (3) pair with nest and young.

**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE** Seven sites: (1)-(3) regular presence, usually of one individual, but pairs twice; (4)-(7) singles in mid summer. (In addition, singles reported on 23 occasions from July onwards, at 11 different localities.)

**STAFFORDSHIRE** Three localities: 36 casual sightings, but mostly clustered in three main areas; thought likely that one or two pairs breeding.

**WARWICKSHIRE** One site: pair reared two young at regular site.

**WORCESTERSHIRE** One site: (1) pair presumably bred as four present in vicinity of traditional nest site in late August; (2)-(4) several (counted as three) casual sightings elsewhere, and presence of second pair thought likely.

**Wales** One site: no evidence of breeding.

**GWENT** One site: pair seen regularly over period of two months.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Pairs proved breeding	24	47	38	59	51	70	80	64	51	97	78
Pairs possibly breeding	65	96	133	143	119	156	132	155	160	202	255
Young reared (minimum)	24	51	42	69	78	96	72	86	89	63	104

The increases apparently result from much assiduous fieldwork rather than a population increase. Even so, several recorders expressed the opinion that the numbers they were reporting were probably too low.

### Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*

Six sites: 1-12 pairs breeding.

**England, SE** Two sites: (1) up to three calling from 25th April to 8th May; (2) three pairs, one of which reared at least three young.



**England, E** Four sites: (1) individual(s) heard from 12th to 22nd April and on 22nd June and 6th August (the paucity of calls was assumed by the recorders to suggest that breeding was unlikely); (2) one or two calling nightly from 15th April to 6th May and occasionally to end of May, one calling 14th June; (3) two calling on 10th and 11th June; (4) one calling from 16th to 23rd April.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Counties	0	4	0	1	3	6	2	1	3	1	3
Sites	0	4	0	2	4	6	4	3	4	2	6
Singing males	0	5	0	2	7	6	8	4	9	3	12

A slight improvement on the position in 1982, but the table reveals that the numbers reported tend to fluctuate from year to year.

**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*

One site: 1 pair breeding.

**England, E** One site.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE One site: one pair laid four eggs on a flooded arable field. The field dried out rapidly, despite attempts to pump water onto it, and the eggs were taken by a predator on the night of 14th June, probably by a fox *Vulpes vulpes*.

This was the first attempted breeding in Britain since 1945.

**Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Nine sites: 238 pairs reared 192-197 young.

**England, SE and E** Nine sites. As usual, key ones were Havergate Island, where about 126 pairs built 215 nests and eventually fledged 57 young from 34 broods, and Minsmere, where 69 or more pairs fledged 111 young from 50 broods.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	4	4	6	5	6	3	3	5	5	9	9
Breeding pairs (minima)	149	125	158	151	146	145	147	168	201	190	238
Young reared (minima)	115	64	142	68	14	92	99	101	155	150	192

The most successful year to date, continuing the long-term upward trend. At the same time, the productivity figures from the somewhat controlled habitat on Havergate serve to emphasise the uncertainties of breeding.





**Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oedicnemus*

36 sites: 20-67 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** 15 sites: (1)-(15) total of 12-28 pairs breeding, but only seven young known. Detailed reports from one county highlight the difficulties of successful breeding, as follows. Twelve sites: (1) one individual for four days in early April, not seen on subsequent visits; (2) five pairs present during the season: only pair watched closely hatched two chicks which were lost; second clutch successfully incubated, but these chicks also thought to have been lost; for four other pairs, only one chick seen; (3) pair in April; (4) three pairs during breeding season; two of them hatched young, which disappeared; (5) two pairs present in late April; (6) pair located on 25th April, but field cultivated two days later; (7) two pairs; (8) single individual seen frequently; (9) singles seen on 23rd April and 24th July; (10) eggs being incubated on 23rd May, but no Stone-curlews seen in area on 30th May; (11) single feeding on several dates between 15th June and 27th July; two calling nearby at night thought to include this one; (12) pair reared three young.

**England, SE** Six sites: total of 4-6 breeding pairs, but only two young known.

**England, E** 15 sites: (1)-(15) total of 4-33 pairs breeding, but no reports of breeding success.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Pairs proved breeding	26	28	47	16	4	20	34	8	10	8	20
Pairs possibly breeding	90	67	72	109	27	34	81	45	53	67	67

The Stone-curlew is not an easy species to monitor, especially for breeding success, and the Panel is very appreciative of the detailed information submitted. The record is, however, believed to be incomplete, and observers with additional information are urged to submit it in the interests of compiling a reliable national status report of this threatened species.

**Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus*

Incomplete data.

**England** Two sites: (1) male with two chicks about ten days old on 7th July, and another male with three well-grown chicks on 7th July; (2) male on 17th July.

**Scotland** Report received from one region only, but this mentioned three pairs with young, a male with three eggs, and 31 young or juveniles in the company of 22 adults.

The above information is rather fuller than that which the Panel was able to publish in the 1982 report, and we are grateful for the co-operation received. It is, however, obvious that many more data need to be brought together before there can be a realistic assessment of the breeding population of this species.

**Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii*

One site: 0-2 pairs breeding.

**Scotland, N** One site: up to four adults on dates between 17th May and 26th June, with display indicative of possible breeding.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	1	2	1	2	3	3	4	5	1	3	1
Pairs proved breeding	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	1	0
Pairs possibly breeding	2	3	2	4	5	6	6	6	1	3	2

There is no reason to suppose that there has been any significant change in status in recent years.

### **Purple Sandpiper** *Calidris maritima*

One site: 0-1 pair breeding.

**Scotland, Mid and N** One site: one adult on various dates between 13th May and 17th June; no evidence suggestive of breeding.

The site was the one where breeding occurred in 1978, 1979, 1980 and 1982, but not, apparently, in 1981. Thus, the absence of evidence of a pair may not be very significant.

### **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus*

One site: 0-1 pair breeding.

**Scotland** One site: pair from 8th to 14th June. Frequent song-fighting by the male, and on one occasion one settled into a depression in short turf, making shuffling movements as though creating a scrape. Only one from 15th to 20th June and from 29th June to 4th July. Not thought to have bred.

Even on its north Scandinavian breeding grounds, the Broad-billed Sandpiper is nowhere common, and there were only 58 records of the species in Britain and Ireland in the 26 years since the establishment of the *British Birds Rarities Committee*.

### **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax*

Six sites: two to seven females breeding.

**England, SE** One site: single on 18th June and male on 1st July.

**England, E** Two sites: (1) male and female on 12th and 15th June, then up to ten males lekking strongly before two females, then no females observed from 28th June to 26th July: nesting could have taken place, but there was no evidence of it; (2) single male on three dates in May and June.

**England, N** Three sites: (1) five males at lek, two females bred, probably a third and possibly a fourth; (2) three males lekking on 15th May and six on 5th July; (3) nine males and one female on 8th May, up to three males later in May and in June, and up to 20 females later in May.

1973 1974 1975 1976 1977 1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983

Sites	2	2	5	6	6	4	12	10	10	13	6
Nests	0	2	2	4	0	0	3	3	0	1	2
Max. no. females possibly nesting	8	12	27	17	16	4	22	13	13	23	32

With numbers so given to fluctuations, there is still no real evidence of any long-term trend.

### **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*

Ten sites: 32-44 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** One site: 1-2 pairs breeding.

**SOMERSET** One site: two pairs, one known to have hatched chicks, which believed to have died during thunder-storm.

**England, SE** Two sites: 1-6 pairs breeding.

**ESSEX** One site: three in suitable habitat on 16th June.

**KENT** One site: three pairs present of which one seen with young, second may have bred and third apparently non-breeding.

**England, E** Five sites: 27-33 pairs breeding.

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE** Three sites: (1) 11 pairs, but flooding forced them to nest on arable land:



apparently only one pair successful, rearing four young; (2) 14 pairs, nine known to have reared young; (3) pair and third individual in early May, only one by 22nd.

NORFOLK One site: six pairs summered, two on 'washland' which lost nests to floods, and four on arable land, for which outcome unknown.

SUFFOLK One site: pair reared two young.

**England, N** One site: two pairs heard calling to chicks.

**Scotland, N & W** One site.

SHETLAND One site: pair reared at least one chick.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	9	12	10	13	11	13	13	11	5	13	10
Pairs proved breeding	55	51	63	72	37	50	39	52	22	38	32
Pairs possibly breeding	61	58	71	87	70	68	64	77	26	69	44

A poor season for this species, although not so bad as 1981. Severe flooding in East Anglia evidently affected breeding numbers and success.

### Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Three sites: 1-5 pairs breeding.

**Scotland, N** Three sites.

INVERNESS-SHIRE Two sites: (1) displaying from 8th May, three pairs found, at least one of which bred successfully; (2) song on 17th May, two individuals in early June, one staying until 6th July, 'dropped' egg found on 2nd July, but no young seen.

ROSS-SHIRE One site: two individuals, one of them displaying, on 6th June at site occupied in previous years.

	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	5	3	4	5	3	4	7	3	4	1	4	3
Pairs proved breeding	5	0	1	2	1	2	4	2	7	1	3	1
Pairs possibly breeding	8	3	5	6	3	5	10	4	12	1	6	5

The breeding population of this migrant wader remains very small and there is no means of knowing to what extent it is self sustaining.

### Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

Four sites: 18-26 pairs breeding.

**Scotland, N & W** Four sites in three counties: (1)-(4) thought that total of not fewer than 18 males attempted incubation and that at least 15 broods hatched.

These figures are more complete than the ones we have been able to publish in recent years.

### Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

Six sites: 2-8 pairs breeding.

**England, SW and SE** Six sites: (1)-(6) two pairs certainly attempted breeding and another two probably did, but only one young known to have been reared. The fact that some of the pairs were adult  $\times$  adult and others adult  $\times$  second-summer reduced the likelihood of duplication in counting mobile pairs.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	0	0	0	1	2	1	3	5	4	2	6
Pairs proved breeding	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	3	2	2
Max. no. of pairs/singles	0	0	0	1	2	1	3	5	6	3	8

The best year yet for the species, but it is still dogged by poor breeding success.

### **Little Gull** *Larus minutus*

One site: summering only.

**England** One site: one to four individuals on various dates between 24th April and 14th June at same site as in 1982.

**1982 England** One site: three individuals summered at site thought to be suitable for breeding.

### **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*

One site: adult with juveniles.

**England, E** One site: adult on 26th July with three very young juveniles. As there was much calling between the adult and juveniles, the party keeping in fairly close contact, it was judged probable that they were of fairly local origin.

This is the first record reported to the Panel since 1978.

### **Snowy Owl** *Nyctea scandiaca*

Three sites: no males, but female laid infertile egg.

**Scotland, N & W** Three sites: (1) on Fetlar, one of three females which overwintered became difficult to find in late May, then scrape with one egg on 5th June, egg broken on 6th; (2)(3) one or two females in breeding season, thought to be wanderers from Fetlar.

### **Hoopoe** *Upupa epops*

One site: 1 pair breeding.

**England, SW** One site: pair entering suitable nest-hole for seven weeks during summer, but no evidence of successful breeding.

Possible breeding attempts occur in Britain less than annually.

### **Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla*.

Five sites: 0-6 pairs breeding.

**England, SE** One site.

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE** One site: single on 9th June, about 1½ km away from 29th to 31st August (and said to have been seen also in early August).

**England, N** Two sites.

**CUMBRIA** One site: male on 2nd June.

**YORKSHIRE, WEST** One site: single mist-netted on 10th May had good incubation patch with numerous blood vessels and swollen cloacal region.

**Scotland, N & W** Two sites.

**INVERNESS-SHIRE** One site: pair in tree with male singing and presumed female associating, second male singing nearby, but no second female seen.

**SUTHERLAND** One site: single singing repeatedly in early mornings of 19th, 20th and 24th June.



	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	3	6	10	7	17	22	7	11	2	9	5
Pairs proved breeding	2	1	3	1	7	4	1	1	0	0	0
Pairs possibly breeding	3	6	10	7	19	23	9	14	2	10	6

There has been little in recent years to suggest that any significant recolonisation is taking place. Most of the reports probably relate to displaced or delayed migrants.

### **Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica*

One site: 0-1 pair breeding.

**England, SW** One site: female on 19th-20th May and 1st June, in not unsuitable habitat, but no evidence of breeding.

### **Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris*

Nine sites: 3-11 pairs breeding.

**England, N** One site.

**YORKSHIRE, WEST** One site: adult and two juveniles feeding with small flock of Mistle Thrushes *Turdus viscivorus* on 12th August, adult and at least two juveniles on 14th August, two juveniles feeding with Mistle Thrushes on 20th August.

**Scotland, S** Two sites.

**EAST LOTHIAN** Two sites: (1) agitated adult on 22nd April; (2) moulting adult in Mistle Thrush flock on 27th July about 4½ km from site 1.

**Scotland, Mid** Three sites.

**PERTHSHIRE** Three sites: (1) single on 2nd June; (2) flock of 15 on 12th August; (3) flock of five on 26th August.

**Scotland, N & W** Four sites.

**SUTHERLAND** (1) single singing on 29th May; (2) pair carrying food on 2nd June.

**SHETLAND** (1) pair reared two young; (2) two individuals holding territory.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	3	8	10	11	6	3	6	5	6	7	9
Pairs proved breeding	2	3	2	3	4	1	1	1	0	2	3
Pairs possibly breeding	3	7	10	12	6	4	6	5	6	7	11

The association with Mistle Thrushes, reported from two counties, is interesting and may be worth following up in future seasons.

### **Redwing** *Turdus iliacus*

65 sites: 17-68 pairs breeding.

**England, N** Three sites.

**CHESHIRE** One site: two calling in wood on 3rd May.

**CUMBRIA** One site: one freshly dead on 19th July.

**LANCASHIRE** One site: male in song on 3rd May.

**Scotland, N & W** 62 sites.

**ROSS-SHIRE/INVERNESS-SHIRE** 47 sites: (1)-(47) single pairs or singing males, three pairs known to have bred successfully.

**SHETLAND** One site: pair nested and three eggs laid, but deserted.

**SUTHERLAND** 14 sites: (1) at least three pairs with fledged young on 1st May, then successive broods until 7th July; (2) three on 22nd April, all at some stage singing and engaging in

territorial conflict; (3) single singing on 22nd April; (4) pair, first seen on 24th April, carrying food on 29th May; (5)(6) pair at each site, first seen on 29th April and carrying food on 16th June; (7) two pairs carrying food from 26th May to 11th June; (8) pair with young in nest and others just fledged; (9) pair carrying food on 10th May; (10) pair carrying food on 11th June; (11) at least two singing from 13th May to 4th June; (12) pair carrying food on 26th May; (13) single(s) singing on 7th and 16th June; (14) pair carrying food on 24th June.

	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	?	12	28	25	10	10	12	6	18	6	42	65
Pairs proved breeding	12	5	4	13	33	2	3	2	7	4	30	17
Pairs possibly breeding	42	13	28	53	15	16	17	9	32	11	62	68

Another good year, but it is clear that the figures, especially for pairs proved breeding, are greatly influenced by the amount of fieldwork devoted to searching for the species.

### **Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti*

72 sites: 90-266 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** 43 sites: 72-151 pairs breeding.

County	Sites	Breeding proved	Breeding probable	Breeding possible
Cornwall	9	2	3	12
Devon	9	30	35	45
Dorset	9	35	35	62
Hampshire	13	5	5	28
Isle of Wight	1	0	1	1
Somerset	2	0	3	3

**England, SE** Seven sites: 6-52 pairs breeding.

County	Sites	Breeding proved	Breeding probable	Breeding possible
Berkshire	1	0	0	1
Essex	1	1	1	1
Kent	4	4	49	49
Middlesex	1	1	1	1

**England, E** 22 sites: 12-63 pairs breeding.

County	Sites	Breeding proved	Breeding probable	Breeding possible
Cambridgeshire	3	1	1	5
Norfolk	18	0	0	47
Suffolk	1	11	11	11

Note that in the above tables (as always in our reports) the figures for 'probable breeding' include those pairs proved to breed, and the figures for 'possible breeding' include both the proved and the probable. Breeding is often difficult to prove and, particularly bearing in mind that the species is frequently polygamous, the figure for the number of possible breeders is perhaps the best indication of population size.

Breeding success is difficult to estimate, but figures are available for two



study areas in Dorset. At one, a population comprising 12 males and 23 females fledged seven young from first broods and 35 from second broods. In the second study, seven males and nine females fledged at least 20 young. The concept of 'sites' is not always easy to apply, particularly when there is extended linear distribution along a river valley.

Whilst the stronghold of the species in the early years of colonisation was undoubtedly Kent, it seems clear that it is now in the southwest of England and, save in East Anglia, there is little evidence of a northerly extension of range.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Counties	2	3	3	8	10	14	14	11	16	12	12
Pairs proved breeding	1	5	8	8	13	30	46	19	56	29	90
Pairs possibly breeding	14	16	75	80	153	174	163	198	162	202	226

### Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

11 sites: 1-16 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** Two sites: (1) single male(s) singing on 29th April and 4th May; (2) singing male from 11th June to at least 3rd July.

**England, SE** Four sites: (1) one singing from 16th to 23rd May; (2) three territories, one of a pair which reared young, one of a probable pair, and one possibly occupied only by a male; (3) singing male from May to July; (4) singing male.

**England, E** Five sites: (1) singing male from 28th April to 23rd May; (2) three singing males; (3) two singing males; (4)(5) single singing males.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	4	5	3	8	13	15	15	14	8	11	11
Pairs proved breeding	0	1	1	0	3	4	6	2	5	0	1
Pairs possibly breeding	13	8	3	9	26	28	30	29	15	18	16

A number of the singing males were considered to have been lone individuals.

### Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

24 sites: 2-53 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** Four sites: one pair proved breeding.

**DORSET** One site: one singing on 8th June.

**HAMPSHIRE** One site: one singing on 21st May.

**ISLE OF WIGHT** One site: one singing strongly on 3rd July and on several subsequent dates until 20th July.

**WILTSHIRE** One site: adult seen with newly fledged young, but date not reported to recorder.

**England, SE** One site.

**ESSEX** One site: one singing from 3rd to 12th June.

**England, E** Three sites: one pair proved breeding.

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE** One site: one singing on 7th June.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE One site: pair present from 20th May, with nest building from 15th June and two young fledged on 22nd July; a second singing from 18th May to 15th June.

LINCOLNSHIRE/SOUTH HUMBERSIDE One site: one singing from 4th to 10th June.

**England, Central** 16 sites.

WORCESTERSHIRE 16 sites: (1)-(16) total of 13 pairs regarded as probably breeding, plus 31 singing males.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	9	6	3	5	6	15	15	8	3	8	8
Pairs proved breeding	5	0	0	0	2	4	1	2	0	2	2
Pairs possibly breeding	15	7	5	5	11	15	23	12	3	9	9

As in the report for 1982, the above table omits all records from the Worcestershire stronghold of the species, but they are included in the brief summary of status at the head of the section.

### **Icterine Warbler** *Hippolais icterina*

Two sites.

**England, SE** Two sites: possibly 19 individuals.

KENT Two sites: (1) male in sub-song on 6th May and at least ten individuals, several of them immature, between 9th August and 26th September; (2) one singing on 18th June and later about seven individuals, mostly immatures, some occurring as early as 4th August.

Spring reports of Icterine Warblers are not uncommon in Scotland (there were five in 1983), and all probably relate to overshooting migrants. The Kent records are published here because there has been a large increase in the number of spring and autumn records of the species in the county, and they come from near to the established breeding range of the species.

### **Dartford Warbler** *Sylvia undata*

25 sites: 14-148 pairs or singing males.

**England, SW** 21 sites.

CORNWALL Eight sites: (1)-(5) total of at least three and possibly five pairs, at least seven juveniles; (6)-(8) apparently single males.

DEVON One site: pair reared three young.

DORSET Four sites: (1)-(4) remarkable increase to total of 60 or more pairs compared with 28 in 1982. In one study area with ten or 11 pairs, productivity averaged rather more than one brood per pair. Dispersing singles noted in various localities outside breeding season.

HAMPSHIRE Five sites: (1)-(5) estimated total of 43 pairs.

ISLE OF WIGHT Three sites: (1) two, probably both males; (2)(3) singles.

**England, SE** Four sites.

SURREY (1)-(4) total of at least 32 pairs or singing males. At three other sites which have held up to two pairs in recent years there were no indications of breeding, and a further two similar sites were not checked.

There are too many areas of uncertainty, as for example in the New Forest, for the national total to be more than an estimated minimum number of males, but it would appear that the losses caused by severe weather in winter 1981/82 were largely made good in some areas. A singing male at St Abbs, Borders, on 18th May was the first record for Scotland.



**Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapillus*  
66 sites: 5-161 pairs breeding.  
**England, SW** 24 sites: 1-44 pairs breeding.



County	Sites	Breeding proved	Breeding probable	Breeding possible
Dorset	2	0	0	2
Gloucestershire	2	0	0	13
Hampshire	19	0	28	28
Wiltshire	1	1	1	1

The Dorset birds were considered to be transients; the remainder were probably potential breeding birds. The Wiltshire pair was feeding four young on 18th July, this constituting the first breeding record for the county.

**England, SE** 36 sites: 3-110 pairs breeding.

County	Sites	Breeding proved	Breeding probable	Breeding possible
Berkshire	12	0	0	16
Buckinghamshire	5	1	16	20
Essex	1	0	0	1
Kent	5	0	54	56
Surrey	12	2	12	16
Sussex	1	0	0	1

**England, E** One site.

**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE** One site: pair, only on 29th May.

**England, N** Three sites.

**CHESHIRE** Three sites: (1)-(3) singles singing, two of which were thought to be transients.

**Wales** Two sites: 1-3 pairs breeding.

**GWENT** One site: male displaying to Goldcrest *R. regulus* on 13th June at site where breeding has occurred in previous years.

**POWYS** One site: two pairs, of which one fledged four young and second probably bred.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	5	13	32	15	12	7	25	30	35	21	66
Pairs proved breeding	2	1	4	4	2	1	9	7	15	4	5
Pairs possibly breeding	18	37	123	28	31	11	73	78	102	44	161

The table shows that the species tends to show large year-to-year changes, so the high levels of 1983 will perhaps not be sustained. There does seem to have been a shift in the centre of gravity of the population from the Southwest (the original area of colonisation) to the Southeast.

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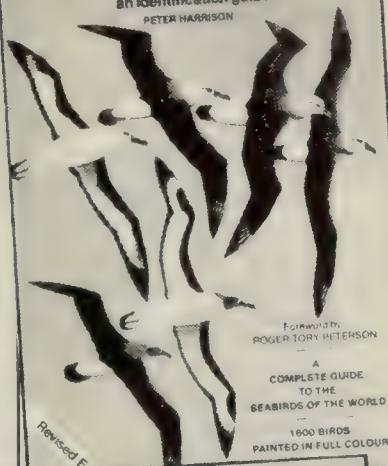
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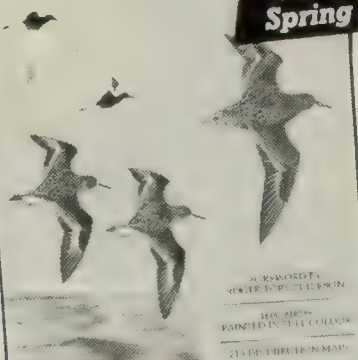
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**Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus*

11 sites: 1-11 pairs breeding.

**England, SE** Seven sites: (1) male on 5th June; (2) singing male from 19th to 23rd June; (3) singing male on 4th June; (4) pair on 31st May; (5) singing male on 5th June; (6) singing male on 21st May; (7) singing male on 30th May.

**England, E** Four sites: (1) pair bred; (2) male singing on 31st July near suitable nesting habitat; (3) male on 2nd June; (4) pair possibly bred.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	2	3	4	11	16	14	17	17	13	12	11
Pairs proved breeding	1	2	2	7	6	7	3	2	4	3	1
Pairs possibly breeding	8	4	7	23	21	28	30	28	26	21	11

It should be noted that information has not been received from one normally important county, so it is probable that the position was actually much the same as in 1982.

**Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio*

Six sites: 5-6 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** One site: female on 8th June.

**England, E** Five sites: (1)-(5) single pairs bred, including one known to have reared three young.

**1981 Wales** One site: pair laid six eggs, and young fledged successfully.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Counties	8	8	7	5	13	11	10	5	6	2	2
Pairs proved breeding	30	30	51	3	48	13	14	23	11	5	5
Pairs possibly breeding	48	52	56	25	64	37	52	31	40	8	6

If all records have been submitted (and there is reason to doubt this), the Red-backed Shrike is rapidly approaching extinction as a breeding species in Britain.

**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla*

Four sites: 1-4 pairs breeding.

**England, N** One site.

**DERBYSHIRE** One site: male singing from 18th to at least 30th June, seen to chase male Chaffinch *F. coelebs* and visited branches where there was nest belonging to female Chaffinch.

**Scotland, N & W** Three sites: (1) pair bred, two young on 19th July; (2) on 23rd June, male 'wheezing' frequently, fed chicks in nest which was also attended by male and female Chaffinches, young in nest thought to be pure-bred Chaffinches, although birchwood site was more characteristic of Bramblings; (3) male singing in open birch wood on 17th June.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	1	0	0	0	2	2	3	3	1	10	4
Pairs proved breeding	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	1
Pairs possibly breeding	1	0	0	0	3	2	4	4	1	10	4



**Serín** *Serinus serinus*

Six sites: 2-6 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** Four sites.

**DEVON** Three sites: (1) male singing on five dates between 28th March and 12th May, with display in mid April; (2) immature on 28th September; (3) present from 8th April to 23rd August, with maximum of three singing males and two females, two pairs bred and reared at least six young from three broods.

**DORSET** One site: juvenile trapped on 13th July.

**England, SE** One site.

**KENT** One site: male on 24th April, two males on 25th April, joined by female on 26th, two females on 27th, pair on 6th May, female on 8th May, and male on 3rd June.

**England, E** One site.

**NORFOLK** One site: singing male on 3rd June.

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sites	0	0	0	2	0	4	0	1	3	5	6
Pairs proved breeding	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	2
Pairs possibly breeding	0	0	0	2	0	4	0	1	6	7	6

The population appears to be increasing, if very slowly, and the presence of juveniles in two localities leaves open the possibility that pairs may be breeding undetected.

**Parrot Crossbill** *Loxia pytyopsittacus*

One site: 2 pairs breeding.

**England, N** One site: two pairs attempted breeding. Male singing on 27th February near where a female was seen building nest on 13th March; not seen at site thereafter, although pair fed nearby on 2nd April. Male of second pair also singing on 27th February at site where his female was found building on 2nd April, nest completed by 9th April and female seen sitting on 23rd April, with male in territory; on 5th May, nest found destroyed, apparently by predator.

The Parrot Crossbill is a scarce vagrant to Britain and this constitutes the first known breeding attempt. The birds involved were part of an influx which occurred in the middle of October 1982 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 482-505).

**Scarlet Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus*

One site: 0-1 pair breeding.

**Scotland, N & W** One site: red-headed male sang intermittently for half an hour on 2nd June, in habitat with birch scrub, field and gardens.

**Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Incomplete data.

**Scotland** Presumably the normal population was present, but the only report received by the Panel was of a singing male on a boulder field in Perthshire on 16th July.

**Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus*

143 sites: 37-145 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** 142 sites.

**CORNWALL** Six sites: (1)-(4) single males; (5) pair, but no evidence of breeding; (6) a female with young.

DEVON 130 sites: (1)-(130) total of 35 pairs proved breeding and a further 99 pairs possibly bred. No apparent change in numbers since the thorough survey in 1982.

HAMPSHIRE One site: male from 27th March to 8th May.

SOMERSET Five sites: (1) pair carrying food in July; (2) two pairs; (3) pair; (4) two singing males; (5) singing male.

**England, SE** One site.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE One site: singing male on 16th April.

The figures are slightly down on those for 1982, but this may be because there was a special survey in that year rather than any real decline in numbers.

*Rare Breeding Birds Panel, Iredale Place Cottage, Loweswater, Cockermouth,  
Cumbria CA13 0SU*



## Seventy-five years ago...

'AMERICAN WATER-PIBIT AT ST. KILDA. MR. W. EAGLE CLARKE announces (*Ann. S.N.H.*, 1911, p. 52) that during his visit to St. Kilda in the autumn of 1910 (September 1st to October 8th) he "met with quite unlooked-for success." Fifty-four species on passage came under his notice, and of these thirty-five were new to the avifauna of the island. Among them was an example of the American Water-Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta rubescens*), which Mr. Clarke pronounces to be new to the British list.' (*Brit. Birds* 4: 285, February 1911)



# Mystery photographs

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**110** No prizes for identifying last month's mystery bird as a species of snipe: the dumpy shape, long bill and clearly striped head and upperparts made this easy. Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus* is immediately ruled out because the bill is far too large and the flanks are barred (not streaked), which narrows the field to the four species of *Gallinago* on the West Palearctic list. Basically, it looks like a Snipe *G. gallinago*; it does, however, seem a little on the plump and stocky side, and the bill appears to be not quite so long as we would expect from Snipe. Perhaps it is a Great Snipe *G. media*? Closer examination, however, reveals the flank-barring breaking up into spots towards the belly and on the breast, unlike the strong chevrons of Great, or, indeed, of Snipe. Also, the basal one-third of the bill is rather too slim and the whole bill too long for Great Snipe, while the extent of unmarked whitish on the belly seems intermediate between those two species. The bird is in fact a Pintail Snipe *G. stenura*, and this excellent photograph was taken in Sri Lanka in January 1977 by Peder Weibull.

Pin-pointing this species' identity on the ground is almost impossible; we can, however, look closely at the markings of the wings for clues. The wing-coverts are rather pale and appear very barred, buff-and-brown, whereas on Snipe these coverts are more scalloped with buff. Although the 'shoulders' of the mystery snipe are partially hidden by fluffed out breast feathers, there is no hint of the dark area formed by the very dark lesser coverts of Snipe; this region is lighter and with feathers weakly tipped with buff on Pintail Snipe. Looking at the rear end of the bird, we can see a markedly short tail (it is relatively shorter on Pintail Snipe than on Snipe or Swinhoe's Snipe *G. megala*), and the tertials which cloak the folded primaries show narrow dark bars (these bars would typically be wider on Snipe). To clinch the identity as Pintail Snipe we would need to flush the bird and



49. Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Gwynedd, August 1976 (R. J. Chandler)

look at both the under- and upperwing patterns. Pintail would show densely and uniformly barred underwing-coverts and axillaries, making the whole underwing look dark, whereas Snipe would typically show an unmarked whitish area in the centre of the underwing-coverts (although they are uniformly dark-barred on a small minority of the nominate race

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50. Mystery photograph 111. Identify the species, the age of each individual, and the approximate time of year. Answers next month





and all of the Nearctic race *delicata*). The upperwing of Pintail Snipe lacks the conspicuous white trailing edge to the secondaries of Snipe (which, however, may not be obvious on exceptionally worn birds). The upperwing appears more uniformly brown on Pintail Snipe, with paler brown flight feathers offering less contrast than is the case with the very dark brown flight feathers of Snipe; the very mealy wing-coverts do, however, often show as a paler panel in the centre of the wing. Pintail Snipe is typically a little smaller than Snipe, although usually matches Snipe in weight, contributing to a rather plumper appearance. Many of these characteristics were covered in my 1977 paper (*Brit. Birds* 70: 146-152). More recently, Taylor (*Dutch Birding* 6: 77-90) has suggested that Pintail Snipe, because of its short tail, shows the toes projecting fairly considerably beyond the tail in flight, a feature which would distinguish this species from all other members of the genus on the West Palearctic list, including the otherwise very similar Swinhoe's Snipe which shows only the very tip of the toes when directly overhead. Unfortunately, however, it is seldom that a flushed snipe obliges by flying overhead. Pintail Snipe often calls when flushed, uttering a somewhat weaker and less harsh version of the Snipe's call; typically, Swinhoe's is silent or utters only an occasional short nasal grunt.

S. C. MADGE

## PhotoSpot

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### 18 Corncrake





51 & 52. Corncrake *Crex crex*, Co. Cork, May 1977 (left) and July 1980 (above) (Richard T. Mills)

When I first visited western Ireland, Corncrakes *Crex crex* were still common, and there were still many rural areas where the inhabitants complained of being kept awake at night by the incessant, loud, monotonous craking from more than one pair. Twenty years ago, a census on Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, revealed some 20 pairs, but none is to be found there now. This is just one example of this species' widespread decline, documented by Dr James Cadbury in his assessment of the 1978-79 census (*Bird Study* 27: 203-218). Nor is the species' disappearance confined to Britain and Ireland, or even to western Europe, as shown by a survey of experts' opinions in 30 European countries (*Brit. Birds* 76: 118-123).

No longer can the human reaper spot and spare a nest; no longer is the



hay crop cut after the young have left the nest, and at a speed which allows downy juveniles to escape. Mechanisation; the early and repeated cutting of grass for silage, rather than for hay; the reduced variety of plant food and insect food in today's weed-free non-seeding grass crop; cooler, wetter summers; and the ever-increasing hazard of aerial wires on migration routes. These have all been blamed for, and doubtless have all contributed to, the decline of the Corncrake. The loss is regretted even by those who can still recall being kept awake in their crofts by that rasping 'crex crex'.

In 1985, the RSPB and the NCC started a joint project to investigate the

53. Corncrake *Crex crex*, Co. Cork, July 1979 (*Richard T. Mills*)



conservation requirements of Corncrakes in one of their last remaining strongholds in the Western Isles. Radio-tracking was used successfully to investigate the foraging range and movements of males and the use they make of different habitats. The Corncrakes travelled widely during the day, but returned to a favoured singing location at night. Information was also gathered on the extent of damage to nests and loss of young during hay-mowing. As expected, this was greater in the more improved agricultural areas.

JTRS

## Notes

**Cory's Shearwaters associating with dolphins** On 4th August 1983, on a shark-fishing trip 16km off Portimao, Algarve, Portugal, the trail from the 'rubby dubby' made up from sardines *Clupea pilchardus* lured a surprising number of seabirds. As a group of at least 70 dolphins (Delphinidae) approached the boat, a group of about 15 Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris diomedea* immediately flew to them. They glided and flappily hovered over the school. As individual dolphins rose out of and re-entered the water in characteristic fashion, the shearwaters would immediately descend and settle very briefly for three to ten seconds on the water, often with spread wings, at the point of the dolphin's re-entry; they would then rise to 1-1.5m above the surface, briefly hover, and repeat the procedure continuously as the dolphins continued to emerge. It appeared that they were trying to feed on something which they 'knew' the dolphins were leaving behind on the surface.

PETER G. MORGAN

Stanstead Lodge, Stanstead Abbots, Hertfordshire SG12 8LD



Dr K. E. L. Simmons has commented as follows: 'Such behaviour is typical of the species, the birds in this case probably feeding on the cetaceans' faeces. Interested readers should refer to a review of the subject of seabirds associating with cetaceans by Dr P. G. H. Evans (1982, *Mammal Study* 12: 187-206).' Eds

**The frequency of hybrid ducks in the Midlands** Mystery photograph 97 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 40-41) drew attention nicely to the confusion which often surrounds *Aythya* hybrids. The frequency with which these and other hybrid ducks may be encountered is illustrated by the following. Between 1974 and 1984, I saw ten hybrids resembling scaups *A. marila*/*A. affinis* in Staffordshire and single ones in Leicestershire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire, compared with a minimum of 45 genuine Scaups *A. marila*: a ratio of 1:3½. These hybrids comprised six Tufted Duck *A. fuligula* × Pochard *A. ferina*, of which five were identifiable as drakes; six Tufted Duck × Scaup (two drakes); and a single female of Pochard × Scaup. Identification was



based on critical assessment of size, eye colour, mantle pattern, and the shape and colour of head and bill. All birds associated with Pochards and/or Tufted Ducks.

Many ducks pair at wintering sites, where sex ratios are rarely equal. For example, at Belvide Reservoir, Staffordshire, between February and May, 59-64% of Tufted Ducks and 57-77% of Pochards were drakes. Although there is a surplus of unpaired drakes, however, there needs to be a surplus of females in one or other species for hybrids to become likely, as Gillham *et al.* (1966) discussed; with a roughly equal excess of males in both species, the chances of hybridisation are greatly reduced. In 1974 and 1975, single female Scaups were apparently paired with drake Tufted Ducks at Belvide in late April and early May. In May 1984, at Rutland Water, Leicestershire, I watched a drake Scaup, with two drake Tufted Ducks, displaying intently to a female Tufted. The Scaup may well have joined in in the absence of one of its own kind to display to, but in no way could this be interpreted as 'giving him a chance' with that female: she will choose one of her own species ahead of the Scaup every time. It is the lone females, without males of the same species, that are most likely to pair up wrongly. (Hybrids raised in captivity probably account for at least a proportion of those seen in the wild in Britain.)

In order to illustrate the frequency with which various hybrids may be found while examining flocks for oddities, data for Belvide are presented (table 1) for all hybrids recorded, together with the parent species. Abundance indices have been obtained simply by totalling the maxima counted in each half-month during 1974-83.

**Table 1. Numbers of apparently pure-bred and hybrid ducks at Belvide Reservoir, Staffordshire, during 1974-83 (see text)**

Species or hybrid	Abundance index
Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	127,216
Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>	238
Australasian Black Duck <i>Anas superciliosa</i> (feral)	16
Mallard × Pintail	4
Mallard × Australasian Black Duck	16
Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>	15,389
Ferruginous Duck <i>Aythya nyroca</i>	2
Tufted Duck <i>Aythya fuligula</i>	48,231
Scaup <i>Aythya marila</i>	72
Pochard × Ferruginous Duck	7
Pochard × Tufted Duck	5
Tufted Duck × Scaup	7
Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	19,778
Ruddy Duck × White-headed Duck <i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>	1

Excluded from the above table are two sightings of a peculiar female or immature duck which exhibited characteristics of Pintail, Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* and Pochard. In addition, a Red-crested Pochard × Pochard hybrid also occurred at Belvide in 1984. It is interesting that the incidence of hybrids in *Aythya* species (0.02%) is twice as high as that in dabbling ducks. Tufted Duck, Pochard and Scaup are, however, far more

sympatric throughout the year than any equivalent dabbling ducks; also, the identification of some potential dabbling duck hybrids (e.g. Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* × Gadwall *A. strepera* or Pintail *A. acuta* × Gadwall—especially females) would be extremely difficult. Surprisingly, there was no evidence that scaup-like hybrids stayed at Belvide any longer than Scaups.

The percentages of identifiable drakes at Belvide are similar for personal records of Scaup (60%) and scaup-like hybrids (57%). It is, however, possible that some female or immature Scaups, and especially hybrids, may have escaped detection. As pointed out by K. Osborne (*Brit. Birds* 78: 40-41), hybrids of the same two species differ markedly depending on which is the male parent and which the female. Thus female Pochard × male Tufted Duck looks like Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* and is rather obvious; when the sexes are reversed, the result is a bird looking very like a Tufted and easily overlooked.

Personal experience in the Midlands, therefore, suggests that over 20% of 'Scaups' are in fact hybrids. This emphasises the need for close scrutiny by both observers and county recorders.

DAVID SMALLSHIRE

42 Bridge Street, Shepshed, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE12 9AD

#### REFERENCE

- GILLHAM, E., HARRISON, J. M., & HARRISON, J. G. 1966. A study of certain *Aythya* hybrids. *Wildfowl Trust Ann. Rep.* 17: 49-65.

**Male Red-breasted Merganser displaying to Goosanders** On 26th March 1983, at Chew Valley Lake, Avon, I watched a male Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* swimming and diving with a party of nine Goosanders *M. merganser* (four males and five females/immatures). After I had been watching for about four minutes, three of the male Goosanders adopted in quick succession the 'Salute' courtship display, stretching their necks until the bills pointed straight up (see *BWP*). A few seconds later, the Red-breasted Merganser saluted while facing the party, with neck stretched in diagonal posture; it repeated this on three further occasions in the following two minutes, before swimming away for about 70m and flying off. No other form of display was noted. There were no other Red-breasted Mergansers nearby.

STEPHEN B. EDWARDS

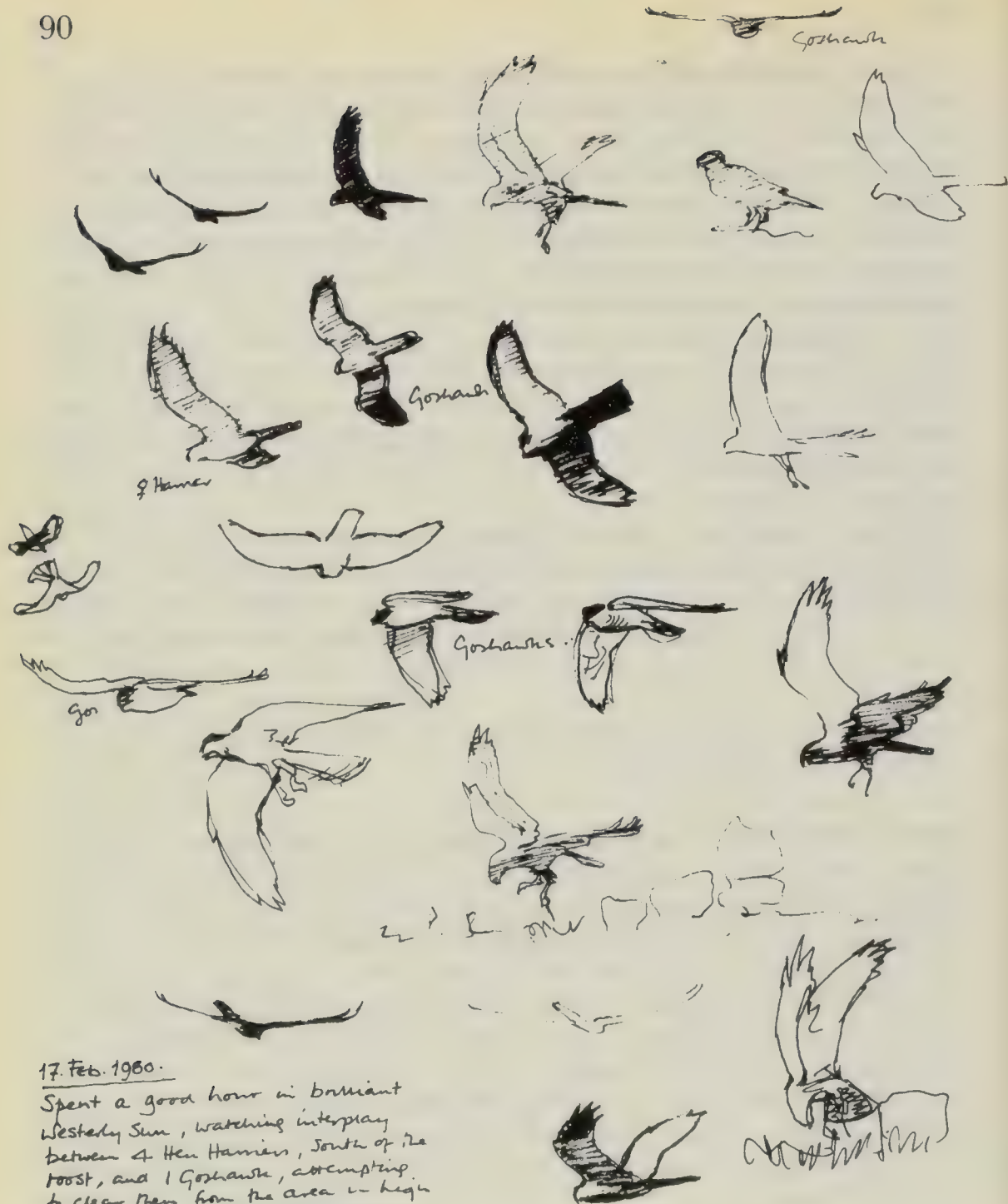
Hazeldene, Medbourne Lane, Liddington, Swindon, Wiltshire

Although displaying to the 'wrong' species is commonly observed among ducks in captivity, Dr K. E. L. Simmons has commented that this is an 'interesting case of socially facilitated display by one species to another when both the displays and the females are similar'. Eds

#### Prolonged aerial encounters between Hen Harriers and Goshawk

I was most interested to read David S. Marshall's note on prolonged aerial encounters between two Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* and a Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* (*Brit. Birds* 76: 448-449). I have an entry in my field notebook for the same date, 17th February 1980, also on a Yorkshire moor, and presumably the same site. Between 15.30 and 16.30 GMT, I watched a Goshawk making continuous attacks on no fewer than four 'ringtail'





17. Feb. 1980.

Spent a good hour in brilliant Westedly Sun, watching interplay between 4 Hen Harriers, South of the roost, and 1 Goshawk, attempting to clear them from the area in high wind (billy). Viewed at  $\frac{1}{2}$ mi - 1mi. over ridge through Binocs + Telescope. Gos. distinguishable from Harrier, even through Binocs by lack of dihedral & faster wing-beats. Harriers frequently careened with each other in the wind. Also - Harrier appeared to be taking votes from moor. Often dropping repeatedly from height of about 2' onto one spot, before flying off with prey.

Hen Harriers + Goshawks

(Derick Watson)

(female/immature) Hen Harriers. The attacks lasted for the whole period, and ceased only when the raptors were disturbed by a walker. The harriers frequently careened with each other in the strong westerly wind, and on several occasions appeared to take rodents, possibly field voles *Microtus agrestis*. There may be territorial reasons for the prolonged nature of the

attacks, since the area in question is adjacent to a regular communal harrier roost and is also favoured by the local Goshawk population. On this occasion, the harriers were assembling near the roost earlier than usual, at a time when the hawks were still present.

DERICK WATSON

*The Old Farm Cottage, Greenhead Farm, Church Lane, Shepley,  
Huddersfield HD8 8AF*

**Turnstones apparently preying on sea anemones** On 15th January 1983, during our ecological research on the intertidal beadlet anemone *Actinia equina* at Burniston, North Yorkshire, we disturbed a party of Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* feeding immediately above the receding tide. At this feeding site, which was at mean tide level, we discovered about 25 badly damaged anemones, together with numerous loose tissue fragments; the oral discs of several were completely missing. This led us to believe that the Turnstones were responsible for the damage. Similarly mutilated anemones had been noticed in March 1982 at Robin Hood's Bay, North Yorkshire, but the cause was not discerned. The type of damage and the presence of numerous fragments strongly suggest that the Turnstones had been raiding the gastric cavities (coelenterons) of the anemones for potential food items, rather than consuming anemone tissue itself. The absence of known vertebrate predators of *Actinia* species (Ottaway 1977) intimates that anemones are inedible or distasteful: anemones possess batteries of stinging cells (nematocysts), some types of which contain potent toxins, and some species also exhibit general tissue toxicity (Mariscal 1974). In order to ascertain both the size range and the diversity of prey taken by *A. equina*, we collected a food bolus from each of 25 anemones from close to the site where the Turnstones had been observed. These were fixed in 70% ethanol, and prey items separated and identified under a binocular microscope; items comprised Annelida (four), Mollusca (five), Arthropoda (41) and Chaetagnatha (two). A comparison of our data with those on the diet of Turnstones given by Cramp & Simmons (1983) clearly indicates that it could be profitable for this opportunistic species to prey on anemones.

If our inference concerning the behaviour of Turnstones is correct, these observations apparently constitute the first documented example of birds utilising coelenterates in this manner (see Brockmann & Barnard 1979 for a review of kleptoparasitism by birds).

ALISON M. DONOGHUE, DONALD L. J. QUICKE and ROBIN C. BRACE

*Department of Zoology, University of Nottingham, University Park,  
Nottingham NG7 2RD*

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Although the anemone's prey (rather than the anemone itself) was the attraction, the destruction of the anemone would lead us to categorise the attacker as a predator rather than a kleptoparasite. We would welcome details of any observations of Turnstones or other birds feeding from sea anemones. EDS



# Letters

**Thanks for the Nutcracker arrangements** On Sunday 3rd November 1985, I had marvellous views of a Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* feeding on an apple tree near Westleton, Suffolk (plates 54-59). The whole event was exceptionally well organised and I should like to say thank you to the people responsible. A special area was set aside for car parking; the farmer



**54-59.** Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*, Suffolk, November 1985 (above, *David Tippling*; right, *John Hewitt*; below, *G. Messenbird*; opposite page, top, *Tony Croucher*; centre, *Peter Gasson*; bottom, *J. R. Clarkson*)









deserves our gratitude for this and for allowing several hundred birders onto his land. I hope the subsequent collection was a success. Many thanks to all concerned.

DAVE ODELL

78 Laurel Walk, Kempston, Bedford MK42 7NT

We often receive letters with this message, but obviously cannot publish them all each time. Indeed, we must make this the last such occasion, but hope that it will be remembered. The majority of those who travel to see rare birds *do* appreciate the organisational work which has been carried out on their behalf. EDS

**Thanks to the Sora watchers** I wish to express my thanks to all the birdwatchers—many of whom, I am sure, read *British Birds*—for the way in which they conducted themselves on the very small causeway across Pagham Lagoon, West Sussex. The Sora *Porzana carolina* was most obliging and easily seen (*Brit. Birds* 79: plates 30 & 31); had it not been, then many problems could have resulted. All behaved extremely well, however, and many of the local residents have commented to me on the good and friendly nature of all concerned. I also commend those who contributed to the 'donations box': they raised over £280.00 for the Reserve, most of which will be spent on display material and binoculars (the latter primarily for use by schoolchildren) at our Information Centre.

R. M. LORD

Warden, Pagham Harbour Local Nature Reserve, c/o 10 Horsefield Road, Selsey,  
Chichester, West Sussex PO20 9EZ

This is, of course, the behaviour which should be taken for granted. We publish this letter, however, to demonstrate that it is not only the occasional instances of bad behaviour which gain 'media attention'. With scores of well-attended 'twiches' each year, we shall not in future be able to devote space to letters of appreciation such as this welcome one from Bob Lord. EDS

## Announcements

**As guaranteed** We thank all those who helped us to cope with the November-January mail avalanche by resubscribing before the end of November. By taking on extra staff, we managed to keep our promise (*Brit. Birds* 78: 600) that their January issues would be despatched on schedule. Many resubscriptions received after this were also processed. Some subscribers who resubscribed late will, however, be receiving their January issue at the same time at this February issue.

**Young Ornithologists of the Year, 1985** *British Birds* again sponsored this annual competition, run by the Young Ornithologists' Club. Entrants had to identify three bird photographs published in the YOC magazine, *Bird Life*, and submit their field notebooks covering at least three months of their usual birdwatching. The number of entries was higher than in most recent years, and it was especially pleasing to see a large number of notebooks submitted in the senior section.

The quality of the notebook contents was assessed by the two judges: the managing editor of *British Birds*, Dr J. T. R. Sharrock, and the National Organiser of the YOC, Peter Holden. The winners of the three sections were all of a very high standard.

The winners and runners-up were as follows:

SENIOR SECTION (13-18 years)

- 1st Robert Fray (15), Oadby, Leicestershire**  
 2nd Paul Mead (13), Ilford, Essex  
 3rd Mark Eaton (13), Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire

INTERMEDIATE SECTION (10-12 years)

- 1st Jonathan Fletcher (12), Reading, Berkshire**  
 2nd Dominic Sargent (12), Roy Bridge, Inverness-shire  
 3rd Rachel Fewster (11), Durham City, Co. Durham

JUNIOR SECTION (6-9 years)

- 1st James Walsh (8), Timperley, Cheshire**  
 2nd Richard Crawford (8), Guildford, Surrey  
 3rd=Andrew Quainton (8), Portinscale, Cumbria  
 3rd=Carolyn Quainton (6), Portinscale, Cumbria



Robert Fray, Jonathan Fletcher and James Walsh were all clear winners of their respective sections.

It was pleasing to see some familiar names turning up again in this list. Mark Eaton, third in the senior section this time, was second in the intermediate section in 1984; Robert Fray repeated his 1984 achievement and was winner of the senior section for the second year in succession; and Dominic Sargent, second this time in the intermediate section, was another previous winner to reappear in the list.

The prizes—£50-worth of bird books for each of the three winners—will have been presented at a special ceremony at the RSPB headquarters at The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, during the Christmas period, and we shall give further details of this in a forthcoming issue.

**‘Birds of the West Indies’** James Bond’s field guide, in an extensively revised fifth edition, is now available through British Birdshop (see page xi).

## News and comment

*Robin Prytherch and Mike Everett*

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of ‘British Birds’

### Sweden’s woodpeckers and Cormorants

Two of Sweden’s rarer breeding species, the White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* and the Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, have recently been in the news (*Council for*

*Europe Newsletter*, 85-4; *Sveriges Natur* June 1985). The woodpecker’s population fell from 100 to 50 pairs between 1970 and 1982 due to the loss of deciduous woodland. Now it is feared that it could follow the path of the



**Middle Spotted Woodpecker** *D. medius*, which became extinct in Sweden in 1982. The action of Government and private individuals may, however, help the White-backed. New broadleaf-woodland legislation may reverse the decline, and 250,000 old hollow trees are to be marked to ensure that they are not felled. The Cormorants, on the other hand, are doing well, so far. They re-established themselves in Sweden in the 1940s (after an absence of around half a century) and since then the population has risen to 1,500 pairs in two colonies in Kalmarsund. Now, the Swedish National Environment Protection Board has given permission for the birds to be hunted, because they are 'an inconvenience to fishermen'. An inconvenience! It is difficult to believe that the authorities have conclusive proof of damage to fisheries. Such a move cannot be supported, and we hope that pressure to reverse this decision is successful.

**Isles of Scilly check-list** Steve Gantlett has sent us this, the latest in his series of check-lists. It must be the check-list that out-lists all other lists! Of the 374 species dealt with, nearly 180 qualify for the 'Only one, or two' or 'Rare' categories. It is hardly surprising that such a well-watched island group should have this bias, but scrutiny of the rarities is full of surprises. For example, Magpie *Pica pica* is much rarer than Pallas's Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*. The check-list also includes much interesting information on the passage migrants, the residents, and the summer and winter visitors. The text has a scattering of Richard Millington's sketches. Copies can be obtained for £2.50 (post free) from S. J. M. Gantlett, 18 Old Women's Lane, Cley-next-the-Sea, Holt, Norfolk NR25 7TY.

**Welcome back to 'Kukila'** Eleven years ago, after only three issues, *Kukila*, the Bulletin of the Indonesian Ornithological Society, ceased to appear. It has now been re-born and we have the first two new issues to hand, those for May and August 1985. They contain a wide range of contributions, from brief notes on behaviour and accounts of new species to or new breeding in Indonesia to notes on distribution and more lengthy papers on the bird life of particular Indonesian nature reserves. We wish it every success. The subscription price for four issues is £8.00 (£10.00 by airmail). For further details, write to The Editors, 'Kukila', PO Box 287/KBY, Jakarta, Indonesia.

**Keep your Sunday evenings free** The fifth series of 'Nature', the Natural History Unit's topical magazine programme, will be on the air from the end of February through to June, on BBC2, at 7.15 p.m. on Sunday evenings. It will be presented by Tony Soper, Iain Guest, Brian Leith and Jeremy Cherfas; the Series Editor is Robin Hellier and the programme Producer Caroline Weaver. In the past, ornithological items have often been included, and *British Birds* will be supplying snippets of information, and advance news of what's due to appear in *BB*, to the programme's Researcher, Jan Ratcliffe. If you have any interesting, topical news, telephone Bristol (0272) 732211, extn 2423.



60. Susan Joy, editor of *habitat*, receives the twentieth-anniversary cake (Tom Cairns)

**Happy birthday 'habitat'!** The Council for Environmental Conservation (CoEnCo) celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the first publication of its widely read and influential newsletter, *habitat*, with a reception in the Meeting Rooms of the Zoological Society of London on 29th October 1985. The current editor of *habitat*, Susan Joy, was called upon to blow out the candles on a suitably impressive cake (plate 60).

**Change of address of Recorder** Ian Andrews, Recorder for Mid and West Lothian (and the Forth islands, except the Isle of May), has moved to 15 The Parsonage, Musselburgh, Midlothian EH21 7SW.

# Recent reports

Keith Allsopp and Ian Dawson

**These are largely unchecked reports, not authenticated records**

The dates in this report refer to November 1985 unless otherwise stated.

## Weather and seabird movements

The cold airstream coming from the north at the end of October which introduced the movement of **Pomarine Skuas** *Stercorarius pomarinus* into the North Sea continued into November as pressure remained high in mid Atlantic. On 2nd, with strong winds out at sea, 126 were seen off Filey Brigg (North Yorkshire) and 54 at Spurn (Humberside).

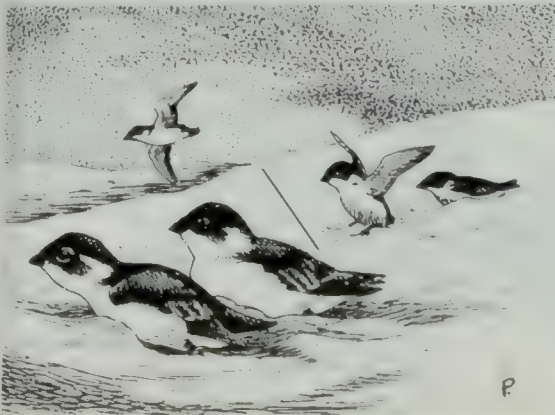
**Little Auks** *Alle alle* were also blown inshore, 88 being seen at Spurn and 64 at St Mary's Island (Northumberland) on 1st, with further reports on following days, including one flying along the A17 near King's Lynn (Norfolk) on 3rd. The blocking anticyclone collapsed on 3rd, and temperatures rose as cyclonic westerly weather arrived. A particularly strong northwesterly blew on 5th at St Ives (Cornwall), bringing 50,000 **Kittiwakes** *Rissa tridactyla*, 15,000 **Gannets** *Sula bassana*, and 35,000 **Razorbills** *Alca torda* and **Guillemots** *Uria aalge* close inshore. Also on 5th, a **Black Guillemot** *Cepphus grylle* was a new species for Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory (Kent), and another was seen at Portland Bill (Dorset) on 6th. Other reports at Sandwich included a dead **Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus* on 4th and a **Storm Petrel** *Hydrobates pelagicus* on 5th. On 10th, pressure again rose to the west, and temperatures dropped rapidly as cold Arctic air arrived on strong northerlies. Another wave of **Pomarine Skuas** hit the British east coast, with counts between 160 and 185 being



made at Filey Brigg, Flamborough (Humberside), Spurn, and Blakeney (Norfolk); many also moved inland, with fives at Hanningfield Reservoir (Essex) and Swindon (Wiltshire), four at Wakefield (West Yorkshire), three at Grafham Water (Cambridgeshire), and several singles, including one at Stewartby Lake (Bedfordshire). Along the English south coast, 20 on 8th was the largest count at Sandwich Bay, and at Portland Bill 300 was the grand total estimated for the autumnal passage, while the monthly tally on the north Irish coast was eight. The weather turned colder, but dull and settled, as the centre of pressure moved to the northeast and Siberian air arrived across the North Sea, only to revert back to northerlies after 24th as the high pressure moved westward. Temperatures rose rapidly on 30th, when, once more, westerly cyclonic weather set in. Remaining seabird reports included those of a **Soft-plumaged Petrel** *Pterodroma mollis* from Spurn seen at sea on 19th, an **albatross** *Diomedea* off the Lincolnshire coast, a **Great Shearwater** *Puffinus gravis* at St Ives on 2nd, the return of the **Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* to Newcastle (Tyne & Wear) on 3rd, four **Ring-billed Gulls** *L. delawarensis* on Belfast Lough (Co. Down) and a **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* at Dublin. Despite the generally colder-than-average weather, northern gull species have not been reported in abnormal numbers.

## Late autumn migrants

A **Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* survived in the Isles of Scilly until 1st and a **Hoopoe** *Upupa epops* was an exotic visitor at Upton Warren (Hereford & Worcester) on 13th. A pair of **House Martins** *Delichon urbica* still feeding young in the nest at Wangford (Suffolk) on 10th seem candidates for extinction. In the first week, a **Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* and an **Olivaceous Warbler**





*Hippolais pallida* were found in Cornwall, further **Lesser Whitethroats** *Sylvia curruca* of the Siberian race *blythi* were present at Sandwich Bay, Spurn and in Shetland, and a **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* was seen on Lundy (Devon) on 2nd. Later finds were a **Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* from 21st to 23rd at Sheringham (Norfolk) and **Stonechats** *Saxicola torquata* of one of the Siberian races *maura/stejnegeri* at Horsey (Norfolk) and at the Wexford Slobs on 23rd. Late October records not previously reported were of yet another **Red-eyed Vireo** *Vireo olivaceus*, at Brownstown Head (Co. Wexford) on 28th, and a **Rustic Bunting** *Emberiza rustica* at Loop Head (Co. Clare) late in that month, only the second ever for Ireland.

### Winter passerine visitors

The Westleton (Suffolk) **Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* continued to entertain during the month (plates 54-59), and **Waxwings** *Bombycilla garrulus* were equally obliging, with up to seven present at

Wiverton (Norfolk) on 25th and in Orkney on 13th, with singles elsewhere (plate 63). The easterly winds brought some flocks of **Redpolls** *Carduelis flammea* of the nominate race to the East Coast, notably to Spurn, where 94 had gathered by 22nd. With them were also four **Arctic Redpolls** *C. hornemanni*, found between 20th and 27th, another being found in Shetland. **Snow Buntings** *Plectrophenax nivalis* were reported to be numerous in Ireland, with 200 at Lough Foyle (Co. Londonderry) on 18th, and earlier 900 was the estimated number on Fair Isle on 3rd. The numbers on the British east coast were less than usual, but those of the **Lapland Bunting** *Calcarius lapponicus* in the English southeast were exceptional, including over 200 at Allhallows (Kent) and 90 at Hollands Gap (Essex). Other notable records were of a **Two-barred Crossbill** *Loxia leucoptera* at Stirling (Central) in early November, a **Dartford Warbler** *Sylvia undata* at Dungeness, and a **Serin** *Serinus serinus* at Portland, the last two both on 10th. The movements of **Coal Tits** *Parus ater* reported



61 & 62. Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*, Lancashire, November 1985 (Steve Young)





63. Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus*, Norfolk 1985 (Steve Young)

last month from Walney (Cumbria) were also evident across Morecambe Bay at Heysham Head (Lancashire), where some 500 were estimated to have passed through during October.

### Wildfowl

The winds have certainly been favourable for the return of winter wildfowl. By 18th, 2,500

**Whooper Swans** *Cygnus cygnus* were to be found on Lough Foyle, and on the previous day 250 were present in Orkney. The 10,000

**Brent Geese** *Branta bernicla* on Strangford Lough (Co. Down) included two of the North American/Siberian race *nigricans*, and the flock of 6,000

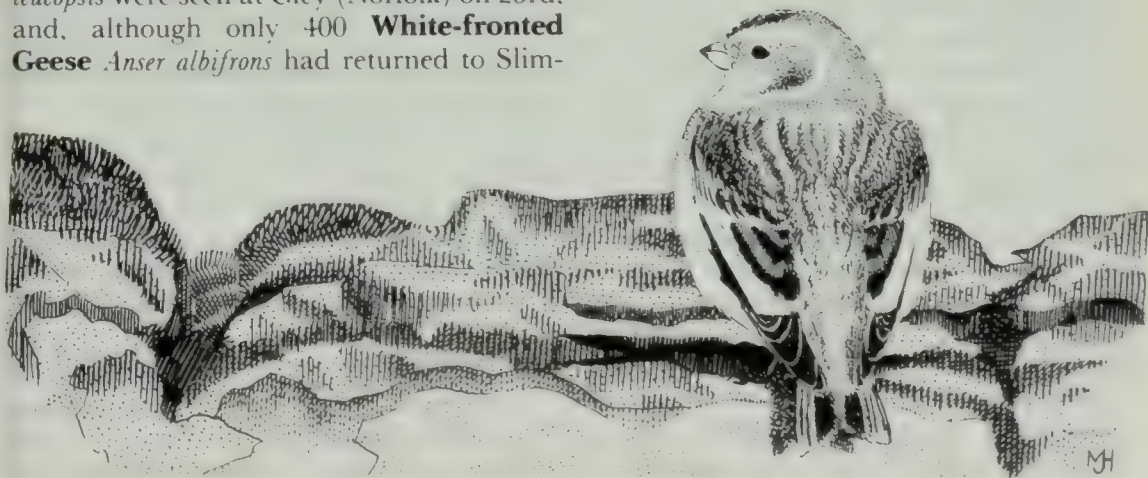
**Pink-footed Geese** *Anser brachyrhynchus* in west Norfolk also included a

**Snow Goose** *A. caerulescens*. A **Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis* was found at St Mary's Bay (Kent) on 3rd, 11

**Barnacle Geese** *B. leucopsis* were seen at Cley (Norfolk) on 23rd, and, although only 400

**White-fronted Geese** *Anser albifrons* had returned to Slim-

bridge, 40% of these were young birds, indicating a good breeding season. Amongst the gathering duck flocks, a few more Nearctics were found, including a **Teal** *Anas crecca* of the race *carolinensis* on Hillsboro' Lake (Co. Down) on 24th, **American Wigeons** *A. americana* at Kenfig (Mid Glamorgan), on the Cromarty Firth (Highland), at Akeragh Lough (Co. Kerry) on 24th, and four at Thatcham (Berkshire) from 20th, **Ring-necked Ducks** *Aythya collaris* at Drift Reservoir (Cornwall), Radipole Lake (Dorset) and Fleet Pond (Hampshire) from 24th, and a single **Surf Scoter** *Melanitta perspicillata* at Dundrum Bay (Co. Down) from 2nd.





### Birds of prey

With the northerly and easterly winds, there have been more **Rough-legged Buzzards** *Buteo lagopus* than in recent autumns. Apart from several in East Anglia, others were seen on Burray (Orkney) on 6th, at Derwent Dale (Derbyshire) on 9th and at Dungeness on 2nd. After the sightings of **White-tailed Eagles** *Haliaeetus albicilla* along the British east coast last month, two became resident attractions: one at Benacre (Suffolk) and another for a while in northwest Norfolk. Also of note were a wandering **Red Kite** *Milvus milvus*, seen at Steart Point (Somerset) on 23rd, and a late **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* at Truro (Cornwall) on 17th, while a **Merlin** *Falco columbarius* was unusual at The Lodge, Sandy (Bedfordshire), on 23rd.

### Wading birds

The obliging **Sora** *Porzana carolina* continued to perform at Pagham Lagoon (West Sussex) throughout the month, as did the **Sociable Plover** *Chettusia gregaria* at Sompting (West

Sussex), whilst another, the third Irish record, was found at Blennerville (Co. Kerry). **Long-billed Dowitchers** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* stayed at Alton Water (Suffolk) and Old Hall Marshes (Essex), while another was seen at Akeragh Lough in mid month. A few **Grey Phalaropes** *Phalaropus fulicarius* were found along the British east coast on 16th and 17th, with one inland at Hampton-in-Arden (West Midlands) on 7th and 8th.

### Latest news

The first half of January was generally quiet, with larger-than-usual numbers of overwintering Goldfinches *Carduelis carduelis* and Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla* in parts of southern England. Rarities were mostly long-stayers from earlier: Red-breasted Goose in Kent, the Sociable Plover and Sora in West Sussex, the Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* in Somerset and the Forster's Tern in Lothian. A new Red-breasted Goose was found at Blakeney (Norfolk) on 10th.

## Reviews

**Gulls and Plovers: the ecology and behaviour of mixed-species feeding groups.** By C. J. Barnard and D. B. A. Thompson. Croom Helm, London, 1985. 302 pages; 14 black-and-white plates; 10 line-drawings. £25.00.

This book—the first of Croom Helm's projected series 'Studies in Behavioural Adaptations' (editor Dr John Lazarus)—is aimed mainly at those interested in behavioural ecology, 'from advanced undergraduate to research worker and lecturer'. Will it, then, appeal to the average reader of *British Birds*?

Well, the first point to make is that it deals with a fascinating subject: the feeding strategies of a gull (the Black-headed *Larus ridibundus*) and two plovers (the Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and the Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*) on pastureland, and the association between the three species, including exploitation of the Lapwing by the other two, and kleptoparasitism by the gull on both the plovers: it steals their worms. All this is treated in great detail against the background of current ideas on behavioural ecology in general and on optimal foraging and flock dynamics in particular, thus usefully integrating two topics that are usually studied separately and providing a valuable introduction to a wide field of research about which the ordinary birdwatcher may know rather little. Anyone interested in bird behaviour and intent on self-education will, therefore, profit from reading this book. Whether he will enjoy it in the process is another matter for an easy 'good' read it is not, rather a very long scientific paper with a prolificacy of all the usual paraphernalia of the genre—tables, formulae, graphs, histograms, and so on—together with a few drawings of the birds themselves and a number of photographs of variable standard. But the effort is well worth the making, aided by a series of résumés and summaries and a closing 'overview' (dreadful word).

A final thought: there has been almost unbelievable progress in the study of bird behaviour

in the last 80-odd years, but some losses too. I was reminded of this recently when reading an evocative first description, in *The Saturday Review* for 12th April 1902, of how the Black-headed Gull ('the Peewit's suzerain') robbed Lapwings on the Dorset Downs; this was written by Edmund Selous, then busily laying the foundations of modern ethology in this country almost single handed.

K. E. L. SIMMONS

**The Joy of Birding: a guide to better birdwatching.** By **Chuck Bernstein**. Capra Press, Santa Barbara, 1984, distributed in UK by Airlift Book Company. 201 pages; 23 line-drawings. Paperback £6.95.

I enjoyed reading this book. Chuck Bernstein obviously enjoyed writing it. Nothing connects the chapters except the author's enthusiasm, which means there really is something for everyone in here: great twitches (for a Ruff!), painful dip-outs (a White Wagtail!), advice for beginners, and warnings for experts. It does, of course, help if you've 'birded Stateside' (I'm picking up the lingo) 'cos then you'll know that Yankee for 'jizz' is 'gestalt', and you'll be able fully to appreciate Chuck's glee on hearing a triumphant cry of 'Black-capped and Boreal Chickadees together'. Big deal!—well, it *is* to 'them'. There's a lot of humour here—try the chapter on 'Pinto' the birdwatching dog—and Chuck is also endearingly complimentary to us Brits: 'The very meticulous magazine *British Birds*'. Hear, hear! What a nice man.

W. E. ODDIE

**South African Red Data Book—birds.** By **R. K. Brooke**. South African National Scientific Programmes Report No. 97 (December 1984). Foundation for Research Development, Pretoria, 1984. Available free from Nature Conservation Research, FRD, CSIR, PO Box 395, Pretoria 0001, South Africa. 213 pages.

This volume treats those species at risk in South Africa which have bred there since 1800. Nine of these are also included in the African Red Data Book, but many species are relatively common elsewhere in their range: it seems strange to us to find House Martin *Delichon urbica* included. Species-accounts are much briefer than in the Red Data Book, though distribution maps are helpful. Standard IUCN categories are used. Many countries are now producing such lists which help to focus conservation priorities, for rare creatures often form part of threatened communities, and habitat destruction is the single greatest threat to endangered species. Even so, the cause of rarity can be determined for only 20% of those birds included—and this is probably the best known country ornithologically in sub-Saharan Africa.

IAN DAWSON

**Threatened Birds of Africa and Related Islands: the ICBP/IUCN Red Data Book, Part 1.** By **N. J. Collar and S. N. Stuart**. 3rd edn. ICBP & IUCN, Cambridge, 1985. 761 pages; 12 colour plates. £24.00.

This first part of the third edition of the bird Red Data Book treats globally threatened species whose centre of distribution is African: further volumes will follow on the Americas, Eurasia and Australasia. The decision not to include subspecies (this volume took four years to produce) is tempered by the generous view of the species (e.g. Gon-gon *Pterodroma feae* and Freira *P. madeira*). A detailed introduction explains the methods used, and is followed by the meticulously researched species accounts—the threats they face and conservation measures taken and proposed. Coverage of the 172 species ranges from one page to 35 pages (for the Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita*). The whole is beautifully presented and includes colour plates by Norman Arlott. Eleven Western Palearctic species are included, nine of these from the Atlantic Islands. The only possible quibble can be the choice of English names: of these 11, only one, the Algerian Nuthatch *Sitta ledanti*, is given exactly the same name as in *The 'British Birds' List of Birds of the Western Palearctic*, but a justification for this is given in the introduction. An outstanding book!

IAN DAWSON



**A Guide to the Birds of Nepal.** By Carol and Tim Inskipp. Croom Helm, London, 1985. 392 pages; 8 colour plates; numerous maps and line-drawings. £25.00.

The pre-publication publicity for this book indicated that it was not an identification guide in the accepted sense, but the title infers otherwise and is thus misleading. The greater part of the work is devoted to the distribution and status of the 835 species recorded in Nepal and is preceded by several short sections on various other aspects of the country's ornithology. The whole is the result of much research by the authors, the enormity of which cannot be overstated. The complete text was set by them on a word processor and the result is perhaps visually disappointing, but the method was necessary in the interests of economy. My main criticism is that there are no obvious headings in heavier type to the various chapters and it is, at times, difficult to find one's way about the mass of closely typed data.

A section of 63 pages is devoted to the identification of hawks, waders, gulls, owls, wagtails and pipits, with line-drawings, some of which, especially the eagles, are just a little too dark. There are eight colour plates, each depicting a different group of birds: bush warblers, *Locustella* and *Acrocephalus* warblers, prinias, *Phylloscopus* warblers, tits, rosefinches and buntings. The key to these plates is tucked away at the beginning of the book and, like several other such references, is difficult to locate. There are chapters on general distribution, changes in the avifauna, migration, and the history of birdwatching in Nepal. Seven pages are devoted to the main birdwatching areas, with three maps.

The main text on distribution (287 pages) is the most comprehensive study undertaken for the 32,000 square miles (82,000 km<sup>2</sup>) that constitute the Kingdom of Nepal, and will form the baseline on which the many visitors to this exciting region can build. Many of the species-accounts include a distribution map with a temporal and altitudinal diagram. Line-drawings in the form of vignettes are liberally scattered throughout, although the styles vary, and many have lost their detail with reproduction. The nine tightly packed pages of bibliography are testimony to the amount of research that has led to this publication and, in spite of the minor criticisms, the authors are to be congratulated for embarking on the project.

Nepal is so rich in birdlife, and now so popular with birders, that there is a great need for a comprehensive identification guide, but, for what I suspect will be for a very long 'meanwhile', this volume, backed up by the available field guides, is an invaluable source of reference and should be bought by every birdwatcher who is going to, or has an interest in, Nepal.

The authors have requested that attention should be drawn to the accidental reversal of the identification drawings of Barn Owl and Grass Owl on page 60. JOHN R. MATHER

**Birdwatching: a guide for beginners.** By John Easton Lentz and Judith Young. Capra Press, Santa Barbara, 1985, distributed in UK by Airlift Book Company. 178 pages; 68 line-drawings. Paperback £6.95.

Author's introduction: 'Birding becomes more exciting the more you understand'. Not sure I'd agree with that. Happy is the 'dude' who doesn't realise that Jays are 'ten a penny', and wouldn't know a 'possible Blyth's Reed' if it nested in the hood of his orange anorak. In fact, I reckon it's almost the opposite, at least for many twitchers: the more you see, the more frantic you become. It gets harder to be happy. But I digress. I hope it doesn't sound immodest if I say I find it very hard to pretend to be a 'beginner'. I find it even harder to pretend to be an American! This book is probably great for Yanks—there's bags of excellent advice, ranging from how to imitate Screech Owls to where to 'bird' in Northeastern Minnesota—but if you're British (or anything else) you'd better wait for the translation!

What *is* kinda cute, mind you, is that Americans seem to regard birding as a 'sport'. No wonder they're not as good at it as we are! I mean: an obsession, a religion, a disease, or a philosophical answer to the meaning of life, perhaps . . . but a 'sport'. Dearie me! They'll *never* sort out 'confusing fall warblers' with that attitude. W. E. ODDIE

**Conservation Studies on Raptors.** Edited by I. Newton and R. D. Chancellor. ICBP Technical Publication No. 5 (based on Proceedings of the Second World Conference on Birds of Prey held in Thessalonika, Greece, April 1982). International Council for Bird Preservation,

Cambridge, 1985. 492 pages; 5 black-and-white plates. Paperback, £25.50.

For those interested in the problems of bird of prey conservation who were unable to attend the Second World Conference on Birds of Prey, the publication of the proceedings by ICBP, albeit belated, is most welcome. Although the conference took place during 1982, much of the information included has not been published in readily available form elsewhere. A handful of the 53 papers have been outdated, but this in no way detracts from the usefulness of the publication. The format and content are similar to the proceedings of the First World Conference held in Vienna in 1975, also published by the ICBP, but this current volume is far better in its presentation, being divided into six parts, each dealing with different aspects of raptor biology.

The Editors' Preface states that Thessalonika was chosen as the venue for the conference in an attempt to focus attention on the plight of raptors in the Mediterranean region. The first part of the book is devoted entirely to this problem, with several first-rate papers detailing the distribution and status of birds of prey within Portugal, Spain, Yugoslavia, Greece, Egypt, Morocco, Corsica and Italy. Some excellent breeding bird atlas maps are provided for all species within Portugal and Morocco, whereas authors from other countries have chosen to comment on species in detail, giving population figures, current status and reasons for recent population changes.

The second part of the publication concerns tropical forest raptors and serves mainly to detail the lack of knowledge about raptors within this fast-disappearing habitat. Part three deals with the migration of raptors and includes several papers detailing movements through the Mediterranean and the Middle East and, as an interesting comparison, migration through the Isthmus of Panama. The Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* is the subject of part four, and several papers from Europe, the USA and Australia are presented, concerned mainly with the species' natural and assisted recovery from the pesticide-induced crash.

Part five is concerned with the management and conservation of raptors and includes interesting and thought-provoking papers on such topics as winter feeding of White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla*, artificial feeding of vultures, cross fostering of birds of prey, and two short papers on captive breeding. The sixth and final part deals with the biology of vultures and the problems faced by this specialised group of raptors, and includes a brief review of the current status and threats facing all Old and New World species.

Aimed at the international scientific community, there is much in this book that will be of interest to the amateur ornithologist, but, sadly, the price will probably mean that few non-professionals will be able to justify putting a copy on to their bookshelves.

G. D. ELLIOTT

**The Birds of Bardsey. By Peter Roberts.** Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory, 1985. 111 pages; 58 line-drawings. Hardback £8.50; paperback £5.50.

Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory has flourished on the 3 × 1 km island off the Llyn Peninsula for over 30 years, since its establishment in 1954. This systematic list summarises all information on the island's birds, with appropriate histograms of seasonal distribution by seven-day periods (1960-82), annual numbers of selected migrants (during 1960-83) and fluctuations in breeding numbers (during 1953-84). Every 'Bardsey regular' will, of course, want a copy of this book, but it has much interest to all students of migration, particularly since the format is very similar to that of books summarising the records of other western bird observatories: *The Natural History of Cape Clear Island* (1973), *The Birds of Lundy* (1980) and *Hilbre: the Cheshire island* (1982). A study of the histograms in these four books provides some fascinating comparisons: similarities or discrepancies in numbers, timing and patterns of occurrence of each species at the four localities. How splendid if all British and Irish observatories were to summarise their dust-gathering data in this same, simple and easily absorbed way. The work involved in gathering the data is well known to everyone who has visited an observatory and been present at the daily evening call-over; but the time needed to collate these data can be truly appreciated only by those who have become involved in this sort of analysis themselves. All British ornithologists owe Peter Roberts a vote of thanks for his labours which have given us such a useful source of information. This extra-special systematic list is made visually very attractive by the addition of over 50 illustrations, mostly by Harry Williams. Alert readers will quickly spot the Red-rumped Swallow drawing misplaced to head



the House Martin account, but other errors must be few, for none is obvious. If you have visited Bardsey (or any bird observatory), or are interested in migration, or in islands, or are Welsh, you will wish to own this book. It is full of fascinating facts. J. T. R. SHARROCK

**Pesticides and Nature Conservation: the British experience 1950-75.**  
**By John Sheail.** Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985. 276 pages; line-drawings.  
 £20.00.

The struggle against persistent pesticides in Britain is one of the major conservation victories of all time. This is a very full account, based mainly on the work of the Nature Conservancy, although credit is given to the important help given by the voluntary conservation bodies. There is little from the pesticide manufacturers, whose files remain largely closed; they have refused all requests to supply details of pesticide sales, an essential part of any full understanding of the problem. The first worries began in the 1950s, then in the early 1960s mass deaths of birds from seed-dressings caused widespread alarm. Much of the material on this was provided by the BTO and the RSPB, working with the Game Research Association, for the Nature Conservancy had not yet set up its research station at Monks Wood. When restrictions were placed on the use of seed-dressings, some people thought that the major problem had been solved, but many conservationists feared that birds of prey were now under serious threat. The results of the BTO's enquiry into numbers of Peregrines *Falco peregrinus*, organised by Dr Derek Ratcliffe, confirmed this; it showed that the 1961 population was only two-fifths of the pre-war one, and that pairs had reared young at only 19% of the territories visited. Ratcliffe hazarded a guess that the pesticides were causing egg-shell thinning and later proved this by brilliant research. Then began several years of bitter struggle to curb the use of pesticides, especially aldrin and dieldrin, during which the main manufacturers bitterly and obstinately denied that there was any connection between the persistent pesticides and reduced breeding success. Eventually, further restrictions were imposed, and the Peregrine and other birds of prey began to recover. This exciting and complex tale is fully covered by John Sheail, who did not himself work on pesticides, but his account is sober and sometimes fairly dull. Although their names receive full mention, he conveys little of the great admiration felt by conservationists for Dr Derek Ratcliffe for his Peregrine work and for Dr Norman Moore for his brilliant leadership of the Toxic Chemicals and Wild Life Section at Monks Wood, which became one of the finest and most effective research stations in the world. His story ends in 1975, when the Nature Conservancy Council was founded and the Monks Wood team disbanded. It is a great pity that the account was not brought up to 1985, for the present position on pesticides is inadequately known and the Advisory Committee on Pesticides has persistently ignored requests, including one from a Royal Commission, to summarise the present position.

STANLEY CRAMP

**Bird Census and Atlas Studies: proceedings of the VIII International Conference on Bird Census and Atlas work. Edited by K. Taylor, R. J. Fuller and P. C. Lack.** British Trust for Ornithology, Tring, 1985. 437 pages; 3 black-and-white plates. £10.00.

During the 1960s, and especially during the 14th International Ornithological Conference held at Oxford in 1966, the need for co-operation and standardisation of bird census techniques became apparent. This need resulted in the birth of the International Bird Census Committee (IBCC), whose first meeting was held in Sweden in 1968. The Committee now meets every two years, gathering together ornithologists, both professional and amateur, from more than 20 countries in Europe and North America to discuss bird census work. Each conference also provides a venue for a meeting of the European Ornithological Atlas Committee (EOAC), which was formed in 1971 to encourage national atlas projects.

In September 1983, the BTO played host in Buckinghamshire to nearly 100 delegates at a conference which incorporated the 8th meeting of the IBCC and the 6th meeting of the EOAC. This volume presents the proceedings of that conference. More than 60 papers are included, divided into five groups: 'Reviews of bird census and atlas work', 'Study design and methods', 'Monitoring', 'Habitat and community studies', and 'Atlas and grid mapping studies'.

The BTO is to be congratulated on bringing out these proceedings so quickly after the conference, and for the high standard of presentation.

R. E. YOUNGMAN

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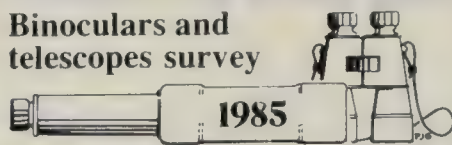
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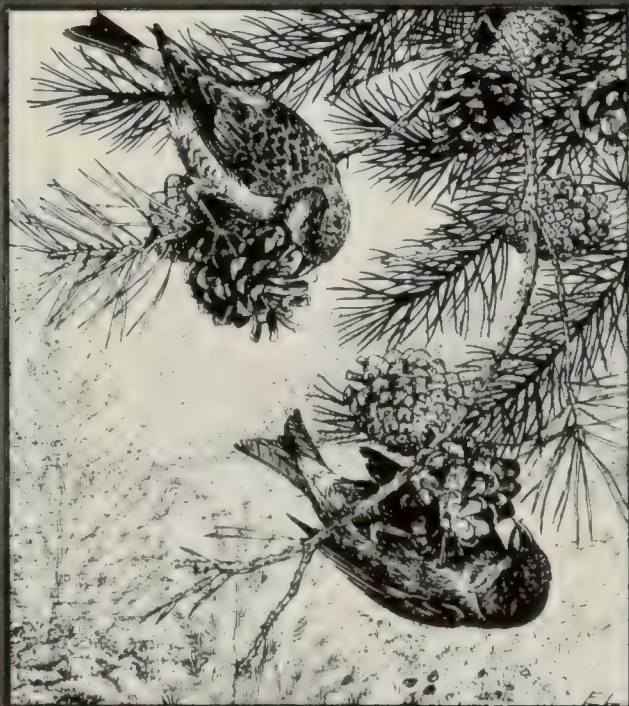
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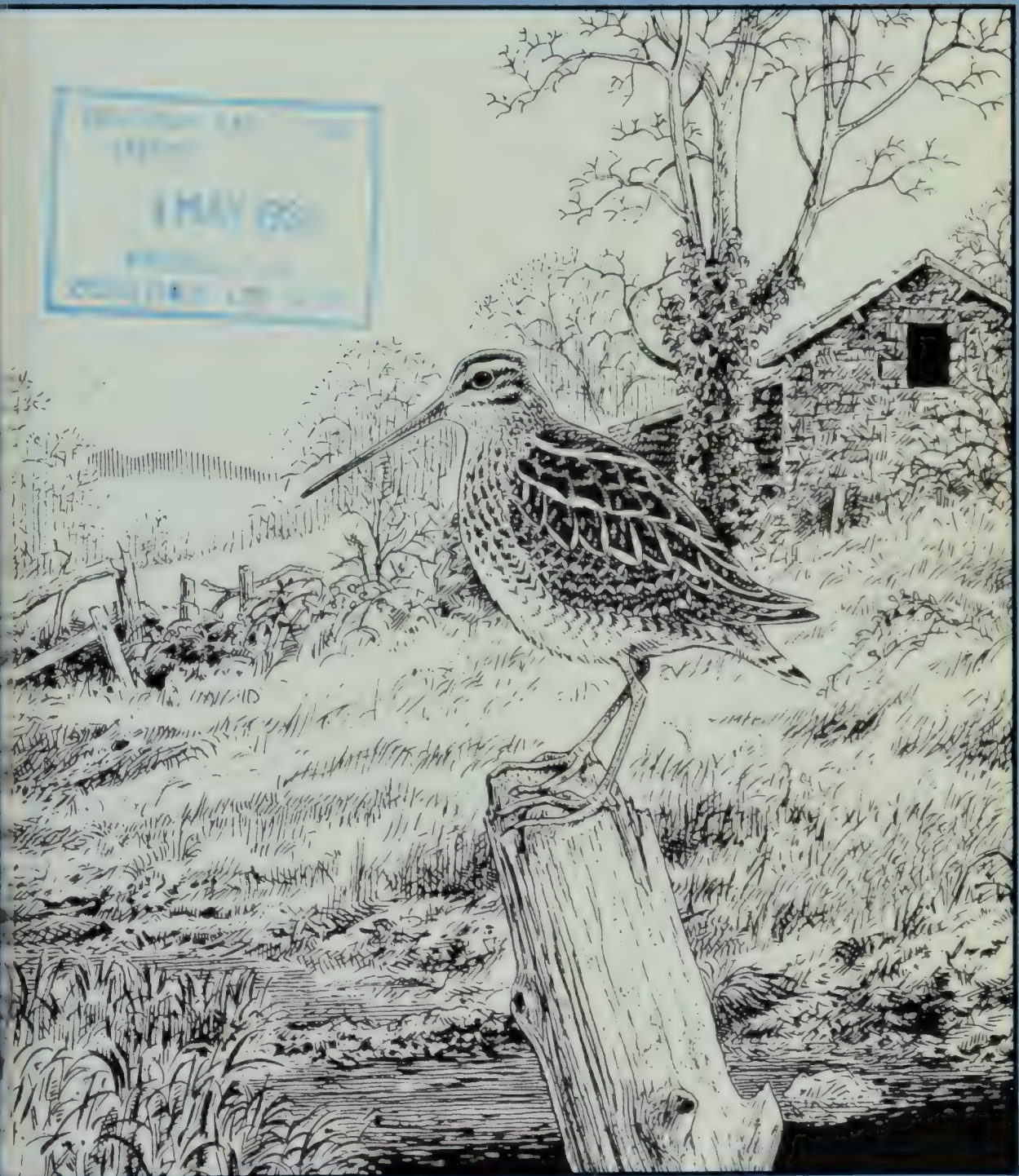
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# British Birds

**Volume 79 Number 3 March 1986**



**Woodlarks in Britain**

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**Identification and status of Great Knot**

**Mystery photographs • PhotoSpot**

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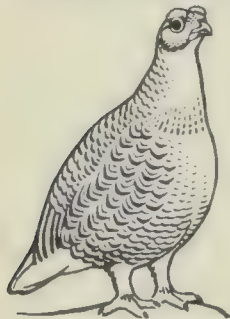
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*Publishing Manager.*

*Production & Promotion*

**Dr J. T. R. Sharrock**

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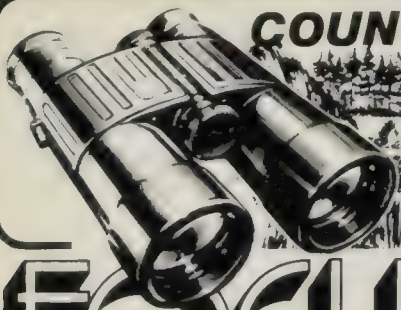


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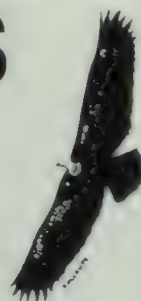
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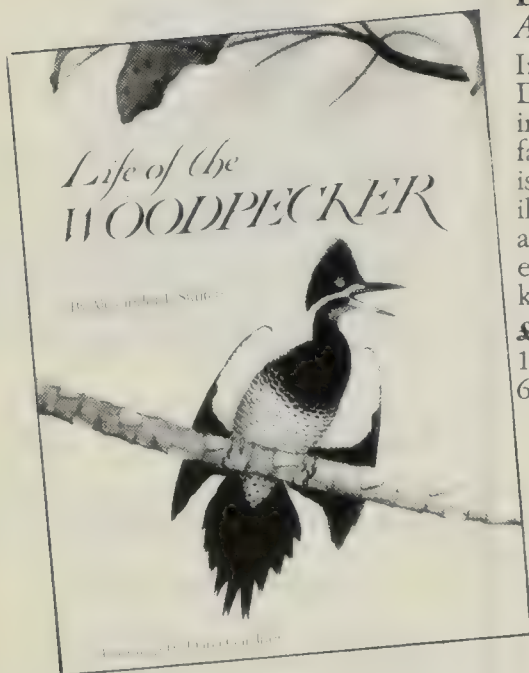
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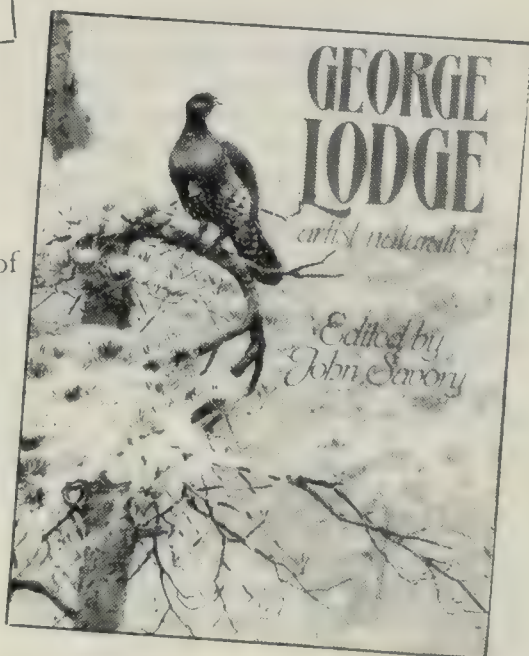
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# British Birds

VOLUME 79 NUMBER 3 MARCH 1986



## Woodlarks in Britain, 1968-83

*H. P. Sitters*

**T**he breeding population of the Woodlark *Lullula arborea* in Britain has fluctuated widely, both in numbers and distribution, over the past 100 years. The reasons have not always been clear. In the past, the Woodlark has been regarded as a sedentary species, with only a limited dispersal in winter, but there is now evidence to indicate that it may be a partial migrant.

This paper summarises the information that is currently available on the status, distribution and movements of the British Woodlark population to the end of 1983. The principal sources of data are the county bird reports and the BTO/IWC Winter Atlas project.

### Breeding status

The population appears to have been most widely distributed in the early part of the nineteenth century, when it was said to be breeding in several counties in northwest England and Ireland. It disappeared from these in the mid nineteenth century and reached a low point in the 1880s. Numbers began to increase in the 1920s, reaching a peak in the early 1950s. There followed a dramatic decline to the extent that by the mid 1960s Parslow (1967) considered that there might be fewer than 100 pairs. This may have



been pessimistic, but there is no doubt that the population was then very much reduced. During fieldwork for *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* from 1968 to 1972, Woodlarks were found in 195 10-km squares (Sharrock 1976), probably reflecting a slight recovery.

The county reports show that since 1972 there has been a further contraction in range (e.g. it is now almost totally absent from Wales, Somerset, Sussex and Kent), but there have been some significant increases, particularly on the Hampshire/Surrey border and in the Breckland forests. The following is a summary of the county report data for the period 1968-83 (arranged from southwest to northeast):

**CORNWALL** Woodlarks were found in 23 10-km squares during the *Breeding Atlas* fieldwork, but most of these records related to 1968 and 1969. From 1970 to 1975, there were very few breeding-season records, but in 1976 there was a maximum of five males. Since then, there have been two to four males or pairs each year, with breeding confirmed in 1983, for the first time since 1968. The latest records are in the extreme southeast of the county, close to the River Tamar. They are probably associated with a similar population nearby in southwest Devon.

**DEVON** The reduced population in Cornwall after 1968-69 was not reflected in Devon.

During the *Breeding Atlas* fieldwork, Woodlarks were found in 40 10-km squares. A county enquiry in 1971 produced 27 breeding-season records, thought to represent about 20 pairs. There were 16 records in 1972, but a more intensive survey in 1973 produced 29 records, and the total population was considered to be about 35-40 pairs (Sitters 1974). There is no evidence of any change in numbers from 1973 to 1981, with 20-30 breeding-season records in most years. There were, however, only four records in 1982, following the severe 1981/82 winter. In 1983, there were 21 records, suggesting a recovery. During the fieldwork for the *Devon Atlas Project* from 1977 to 1983, Woodlarks

64. Woodlark *Lullula arborea* feeding young, Suffolk, June 1959 (John Markham)



were found in 96 tetrads ( $2 \times 2$  km squares). Many of these records related to Woodlarks present in only one or two breeding seasons, and I consider that at no time did the population exceed 30-40 pairs.

**DORSET** From only two pairs in 1967, there was an increase in 1968 with presence in 11 10-km squares. In 1972, there were at least 12 singing males on five different heaths, plus scattered sightings elsewhere. After that time, numbers remained fairly constant, with five to ten breeding-season records in most years, and 12 pairs in 1981. Only four pairs could be found in 1982, following the severe 1981/82 winter. In 1983, there were at least seven pairs, at five heathland sites.

**SOMERSET** In 1969, there were four singing males, but since then the only records have been a single singing male in 1970, a pair in 1973, and single singing males in 1977 and 1981.

**AVON** Two singing males in 1970 and one in 1972; only migrants since.

**GLOUCESTERSHIRE** A singing male once in 1968; none since.

**WILTSHIRE** Single breeding-season records in 1971, 1975, 1976 and 1978, but actual breeding considered unlikely in all cases.

**HEREFORDSHIRE** Single singing males in 1968 and 1969, probably two pairs in 1970, a nest in 1971, three nests in 1977, one record in 1978, none since.

**SHROPSHIRE** A singing male on one date in June 1972 is the only record.

**WEST MIDLANDS** Not likely to have bred from 1968 to 1983. Four records of one to three individuals in the springs of 1969, 1976 and 1977, one in July/August 1972 and a singing male in July 1979.

**DERBYSHIRE** Not likely to have bred during 1968 to 1983, but single breeding-season records in 1972 and 1976.

**POWYS** Present at four localities in 1968, with confirmed breeding at one, one pair bred in 1969, singing males at four localities in 1970, one in 1971, singles in 1972, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1977 and 1980, none since.

**GWENT** A party of 11 in June 1968, none in 1969 or 1970, one pair possibly bred in 1971, none in 1972 or 1973, one confirmed breeding record in 1974, single singing males on single dates in 1975, 1976 and 1977, none since.

**GLAMORGAN** A singing male in 1968, none since.

**DYFED** Present at four localities in 1968 and at three in 1969, one pair bred in 1972, singing males at three localities in 1973, present at two localities in 1974, two singing males in 1975 and 1980, two records in 1981.

**NEW FOREST (HAMPSHIRE)** This is clearly a key locality, but coverage has been patchy. At least eight pairs in 1968, 13 in 1969, 30 in 1971, 14 in 1977, 34 in 1978, 46 in 1981, 15 in 1982 and 38 in 1983. All of these figures, however, are considered to be underestimates. From 1981 to 1983, a breeding-season survey was conducted by the Hampshire Ornithological Society and the organisers estimated that the 46 pairs located in 1981 represented only one-third of the total population (i.e. 130-140 pairs). It is clear that the population was substantially reduced in 1982, when only 15 males/pairs were found. Coverage was, however, again poor, and there may have been 65. Coverage was better in 1983, when 38 pairs/males were located and the population was estimated at 55.

**SOUTHWEST HAMPSHIRE** A total of 11 pairs was located in tree and shrub nurseries in 1981. Three were found in 1982 and six in 1983.

**HAMPSHIRE/SURREY BORDER** The Woodlark population at the heathland and tree nurseries in northeast Hampshire, west Surrey and a small area of southeast Berkshire has been well documented, and Clark (1984) was able to show how the population changed during 1971-83 (table 1). Information for 1968-70 is sketchy, but there were at least 21 males/pairs in 1968, 14 in 1969 and 9 in 1970.

**SUSSEX** Five or six males/pairs during 1968-71, then no breeding-season records until 1977, when Woodlarks were present at three sites. In 1978 and 1979, there was one record each year. In 1980, four singing males were located; there were two in 1981, but none in 1982. In 1983, there was a pair at the beginning of the season, but it could not be found later.



**Table 1. Pairs of Woodlarks *Lullula arborea* in Hampshire/Surrey border area during 1971-83 (from Clark 1984)**

Year	Reported	Estimated	Year	Reported	Estimated
1971	19	25	1978	78	110
1972	22	30	1979	80	125
1973	21	35	1980	127	140
1974	29	40	1981	131	163
1975	41	55	1982	49	61
1976	44	65	1983	not known	53
1977	50	80			

**KENT** One breeding pair and two other pairs or males in 1968, one breeding pair in 1969, single breeding-season records in 1970 and 1971, none since.

**HERTFORDSHIRE** The only breeding-season record since 1964 was of one near Hertford on 7th April 1974.

**BEDFORDSHIRE** A singing male in 1969, single pairs reported breeding in 1970 and 1971, none since.

**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE** Three breeding-season records in 1968, none in 1969 or 1970, one or two present in 1971, none in 1972 or 1973, at least one pair in 1974, none in 1975, one or two in 1976, a pair bred in 1977, a territory in 1978, a male in 1979, no records in 1980 or 1981, a singing male in May 1982, but not found later.

**YORKSHIRE** A singing male on 25th May 1983 is the only record.

**ESSEX** Not likely to have bred from 1968 to 1983, but single records in April 1968 and 1969, and two (one in song) in March 1981.

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE** No records since 1968, except a pair feeding young on 18th July 1971.

**BRECKLAND (NORFOLK/SUFFOLK BORDER)** Numbers were generally low in the late 1960s, although ten singing males were found in 1969. In recent years, this area has been thoroughly surveyed by R. A. Hoblyn, who has supplied the figures shown in table 2.

**SUFFOLK COASTAL HEATHS AND FORESTRY** Four pairs in 1968, six to eight in 1969, 12 pairs in 1970, numbers low from 1971 to 1974 with four to six pairs each year, 12 pairs in 1975, ten pairs in 1978 and 1980, 17 pairs in 1981, 12 pairs in 1982 and 1983.

**Table 2. Pairs of Woodlarks *Lullula arborea* in Breckland during 1971-84 (from data supplied by R. A. Hoblyn)**

The thorough survey started in 1975, so 1971-74 figures may be underestimates

Year	Young plantations	Natural heath/breck	Marginal land	Total
1971	2	1	5	8
1972	3	0	5	8
1973	5	0	5	10
1974	7	0	7	14
1975	17	2	7	26
1976	14	11	4	29
1977	36	6	3	45
1978	30	6	0	36
1979	30	6	0	36
1980	34	6	0	40
1981	35	4	0	39
1982	33	1	0	34
1983	45	2	0	47
1984	44	0	1	45

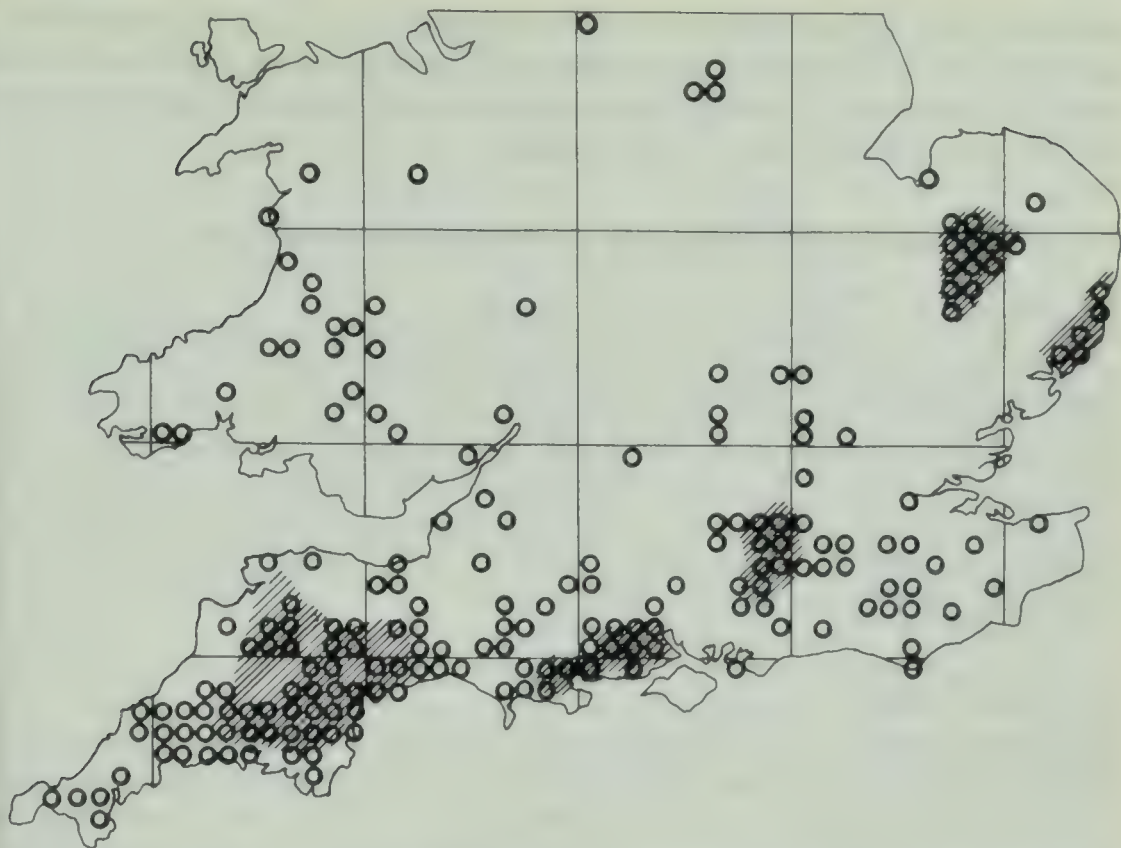


Fig. 1. Breeding distribution of Woodlarks *Lullula arborea* in Britain in 1983 (hatched) compared with 1968-72 (after Sharrock 1976)

It will be seen from this summary that the fortunes of the British Woodlark population have varied considerably during the period under review. In general, there has been a contraction of range, with the species ceasing to breed in several areas which once held substantial populations (fig. 1). There have, however, also been some significant increases, particularly in the Hampshire/Surrey border area and in the Breckland forests. In those areas, the species has benefited from circumstances which have given rise to large areas of suitable habitat.

On the Hampshire/Surrey border, there were major heath fires in 1974 and 1976 which resulted in apparently optimum conditions. The species has also made extensive use of commercial tree nurseries, which should mean that suitable habitat is available more permanently than on the heathland where much of the burnt vegetation has regenerated. The sudden decline from 1981 to 1982 has been blamed on both the severe intervening winter and regeneration of heathland vegetation.

In the Breckland area, Woodlarks have almost disappeared from natural heath/breck and the increase which has taken place has been entirely in areas of recently cleared and re-stocked forest. Such areas are apparently suitable for six or seven years after planting, until the trees reach about 2m in height, provided that ground vegetation remains sparse and there are sufficient gaps in the crop (R. A. Hoblyn *in litt.*).

Sharrock (1976) estimated the British Woodlark population during 1968-72 at 200-450 pairs. After that time, numbers would have dropped to,



perhaps, 160-180 pairs in 1975. This was followed by an increase to 400-430 pairs in 1981. The severe winter of 1981/82 brought numbers down in the main Hampshire and Surrey breeding areas, and I estimate that in 1983 the British population stood at 210-230 pairs.

## **Possible reasons for changes in the Woodlark population**

### *1. Severe winter weather*

There is little doubt that this has been the reason for many incidents of sudden decreases: the cold winters of 1961/62 and 1962/63 had a particularly marked effect and, as mentioned above, the 1981/82 winter also reduced the population in Hampshire and Surrey. There were, however, some severe winters during the 1940s, at a time when the population as a whole was increasing, so it is unlikely that the occasional severe winter has been responsible for the general decline in the population which has taken place since the early 1950s.

### *2. Climatic change*

Southern England is on the northwestern edge of the Woodlark's breeding distribution and on the northern edge of its winter distribution, so it is not unlikely that climate is a limiting factor. There was a northward shift of wind and pressure belts lasting from the 1890s to the 1930s, with associated warm air. Since then, these have drifted southwards, and in the 1940s there was a reduction in mean winter temperature, and in the early 1950s spring and summer temperatures were also affected (Lamb 1975). During the 1970s, spring temperatures remained low, but spring and summer rainfall decreased. More recently, there has been an increase in variability, resulting in more extremes (Lamb 1982).

It will be seen that the increase in the Woodlark population from the 1920s to the 1950s, and its subsequent decline, generally fits the climatic changes which have taken place. Spring temperatures may be particularly important. The Woodlark is an early nester and there is evidence that, in some years, many first broods are destroyed by unseasonable weather (Harrison & Forster 1959), but this is not borne out by observations over many years in Breckland (R. A. Hoblyn *in litt.*). In the light of the recent dramatic increases in areas where suitable habitat has suddenly become available, however, I consider it quite possible that climatic change is only a minor factor.

### *3. Availability of suitable habitat*

Prime Woodlark breeding habitat is open country with bare soil or short grass (for feeding), scattered trees (for song posts) and some areas or tufts of taller ground-cover, such as grass or heather (for nesting and roosting) (Harrison & Forster 1959). If these are the species' only requirements, it is difficult to understand why it is not much more common. In recent years, Woodlarks have been found on heathland (especially when ground-cover has been cleared by fire), in cleared and recently re-stocked forestry, tree nurseries and a variety of somewhat marginal situations in largely

unimproved agricultural country. There are, however, many such areas which are apparently suitable, but which are not occupied. This suggests that the species has other, more subtle, requirements. It has been pointed out that many territories are on sloping land, on relatively dry, well-drained soils and in warm situations, avoiding frost hollows (Harrison & Forster 1959). Such factors may be important, but, even if they are, it is difficult to understand why the species has become so scarce.

Now, it is only in Devon and Cornwall that Woodlarks are still found in agricultural country. Perhaps there it has not been 'improved' so much as it has elsewhere, and perhaps this is a key reason for the decline. Another factor that may have aggravated the situation in the mid 1950s and, at times, since has been the loss of rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* through myxomatosis, resulting in many Woodlark habitats becoming overgrown.

The Woodlark's recent success in areas where particularly suitable habitat has suddenly become available clearly implies that availability of habitat is the key factor which will determine the future of the species in Britain. It is therefore of considerable importance to the conservation of this species that its habitat requirements be defined with as much precision as possible. With this in mind, the BTO will launch a census during the 1986 breeding season which will include the collection of habitat data.

### Movements and winter distribution

The British Woodlark population has previously been described as resident, with no evidence of migration except of quite a local character (Witherby *et al.* 1940). Now, however, there is at least circumstantial

65. Woodlark *Lullula arborea* feeding young, Surrey, April 1980 (Michael Gore)





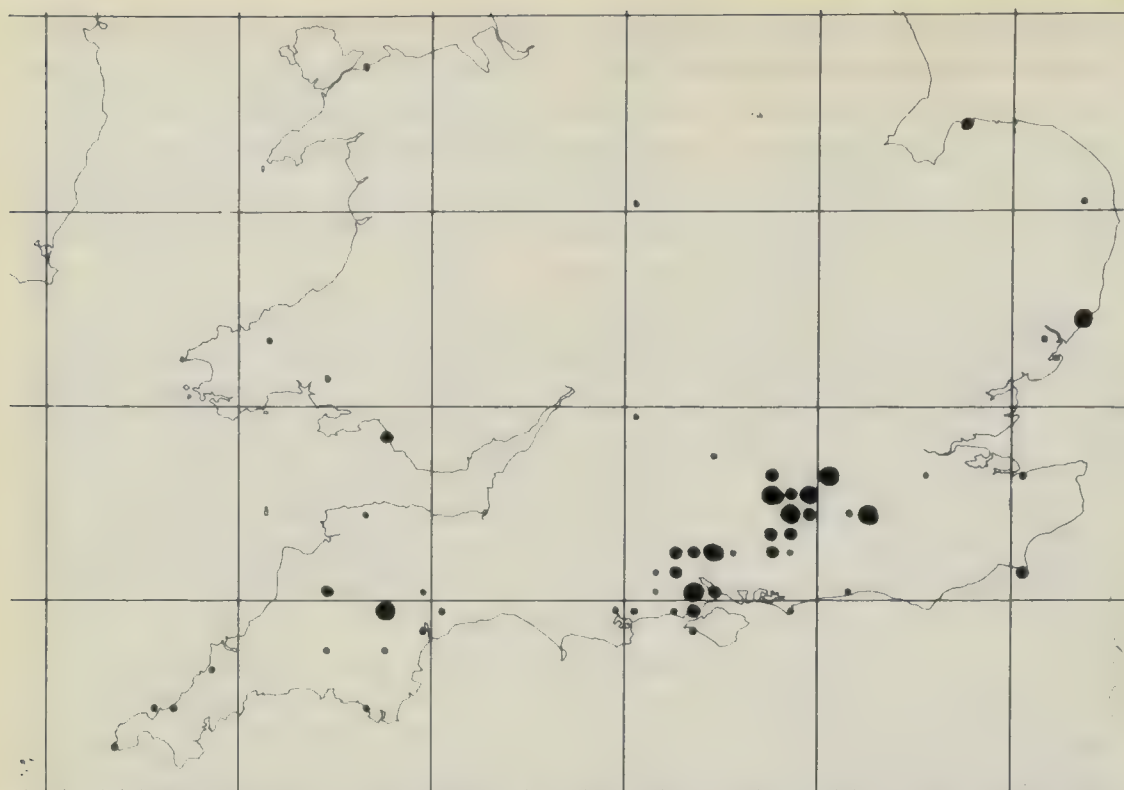


Fig. 2. Provisional map of distribution of Woodlarks *Lullula arborea* during three winters 1981/82-1983/84 for *The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland*. Small dots, 1-2 individuals seen in a day; medium dots, 3-6 individuals; large dots, 7 or more individuals (drawn by P. Lack)

evidence for regarding British breeding Woodlarks as partial migrants.

First, many of the breeding areas are deserted in the late summer and are not re-occupied until early the following spring. The Breckland forests in particular are completely deserted in winter. Payn (1978) considered that Breckland Woodlarks perform only local movements and that the reason for so few winter records in the vicinity is that they are easily overlooked. The only observations giving support to this view are a flock of 20 on stubble fields in the coastal belt of Suffolk in mid January 1983 and 26 at the same locality in November and December the same year. The intensive coverage for the *Winter Atlas* failed, however, to locate any significant number in East Anglia, which strongly suggests that the entire Breckland population (numbering, perhaps, 200 individuals in autumn) moves well away from the area (fig. 2). It is no doubt significant that Breckland is in the part of the breeding range which has the lowest January temperatures. It might also be significant that, whereas numbers were severely reduced in Hampshire and Surrey following the severe winter of 1981/82, numbers on Breckland hardly changed. Perhaps the Breckland population winters sufficiently far to the south to have escaped the rigours of that winter. Elsewhere, although the breeding sites themselves are deserted, a good proportion of the birds remain in the vicinity, often feeding in fields with Skylarks *Alauda arvensis* (compare figs. 1 and 2).

Secondly, the *Winter Atlas* data (fig. 2) indicate a much reduced population in winter compared with the breeding season. Potential winter numbers during 1981-83 would be 1,000 or more individuals if the population were entirely resident, whereas the *Winter Atlas* data suggest

**Table 3. Recorded direction of flight of Woodlarks *Lullula arborea* occurring on coast of Britain, 1968-83**

First figures are numbers of records; number of birds involved are in parentheses

Period	N	NE	E	SE	S	SW	W	NW
Sept-Nov	3 (4)	1 (3)	4 (6)	2 (2)	10 (12)	3 (5)	7 (8)	
Dec-Feb	1 (1)		2 (5)				1 (3)	
Mar-May	3 (5)		2 (2)				2 (2)	

that the winter population is no more than 150-200. Even allowing for the difficulty of finding Woodlarks outside the breeding season, I consider that these data strongly suggest that a good proportion of the breeding population are not to be found in Britain in winter.

Thirdly, the county bird reports show that there is a passage of Woodlarks in both spring and autumn which is noted particularly on the coast (figs. 3 and 4). It is probable that many of these birds are of Continental origin, although the fact that the majority of the records are on the south rather than the east coast of England (fig. 4) would indicate that at least some are British. There is no direct evidence (such as ringing recoveries) of cross-Channel movement by British-breeding Woodlarks, though the reduced winter population suggests that this does occur. There are observations, however, which suggest that Woodlarks (of whatever population) do cross both the English Channel and the North Sea. These include one arriving from the south at St Catherine's Point, Isle of Wight, on 10th April 1974, two flying out to sea from Portland Bill, Dorset, on 22nd

**66.** Woodlark *Lullula arborea* feeding young (*photographer unknown*)





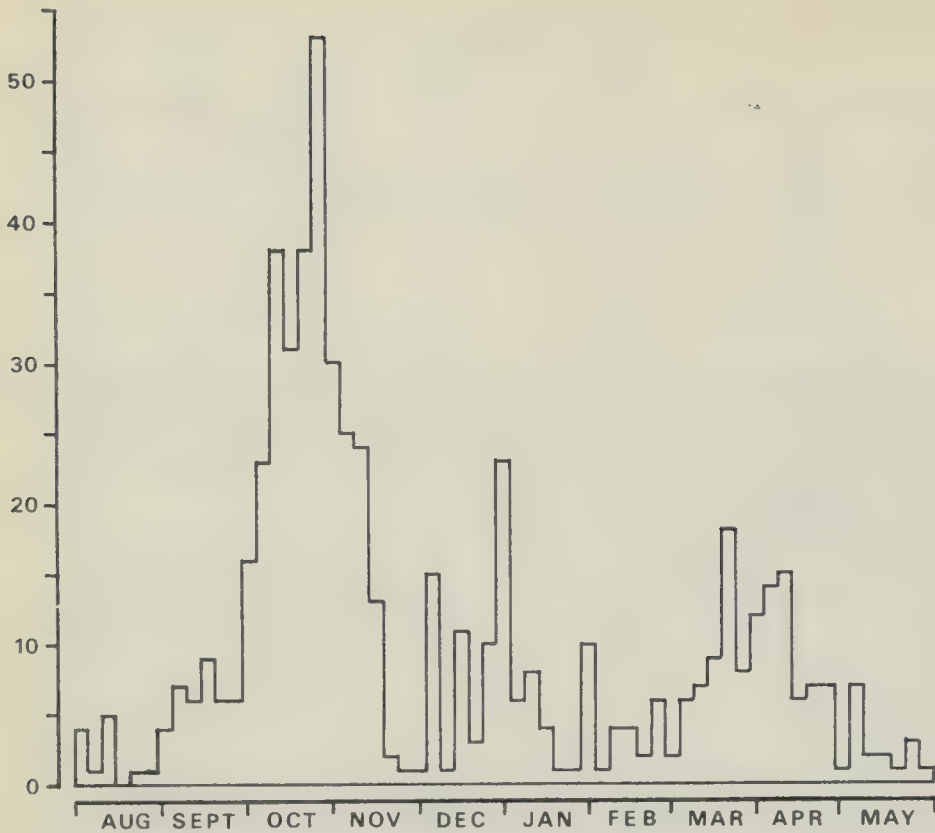


Fig. 3. Occurrences of Woodlarks *Lullula arborea* on the coast of Britain during 1968-83, shown by five-day periods

October 1975, one seen to come in off the sea at Minsmere, Suffolk, on 18th April 1970, and three flying southwest at Foreness Point, northeast Kent, on 11th October 1983. In the case of 41 coastal records of Woodlarks flying over, the direction of flight was also recorded (table 3). Of the 30 records relating to the autumn movement, 15 have a southerly component and only four a northerly component. The few records in winter and spring are all east, west or north, none south.

During the winter, Woodlarks occasionally appear on the coast, usually during cold weather and usually in company with Skylarks (Witherby *et al.* 1940 and fig. 3). The origin of these birds is not known; they may be from the Continent, appearing as a result of weather movements, or British winterers moving to the coast where it may be warmer.

Records of the first appearance at breeding sites are for a wide variety of dates ranging from late January to mid March. Payn (1978) stated that, in Suffolk, most Woodlarks are back in their breeding localities by the end of February, and are sometimes seen as early as mid January. On the Hampshire/Surrey border, most are on territory by early March and, in some years, males are in full song in January (Clark 1984). If it is true that all British breeding Woodlarks are on territory by mid March, then those which appear on the coast in the latter part of March and in April and May must be from the Continent. It is also likely that the more northerly records, particularly those for Fair Isle, Shetland, relate to Continental birds.

The Woodlark's breeding season is long. It is normally double-brooded, and sometimes treble-brooded. In the early autumn, family parties merge

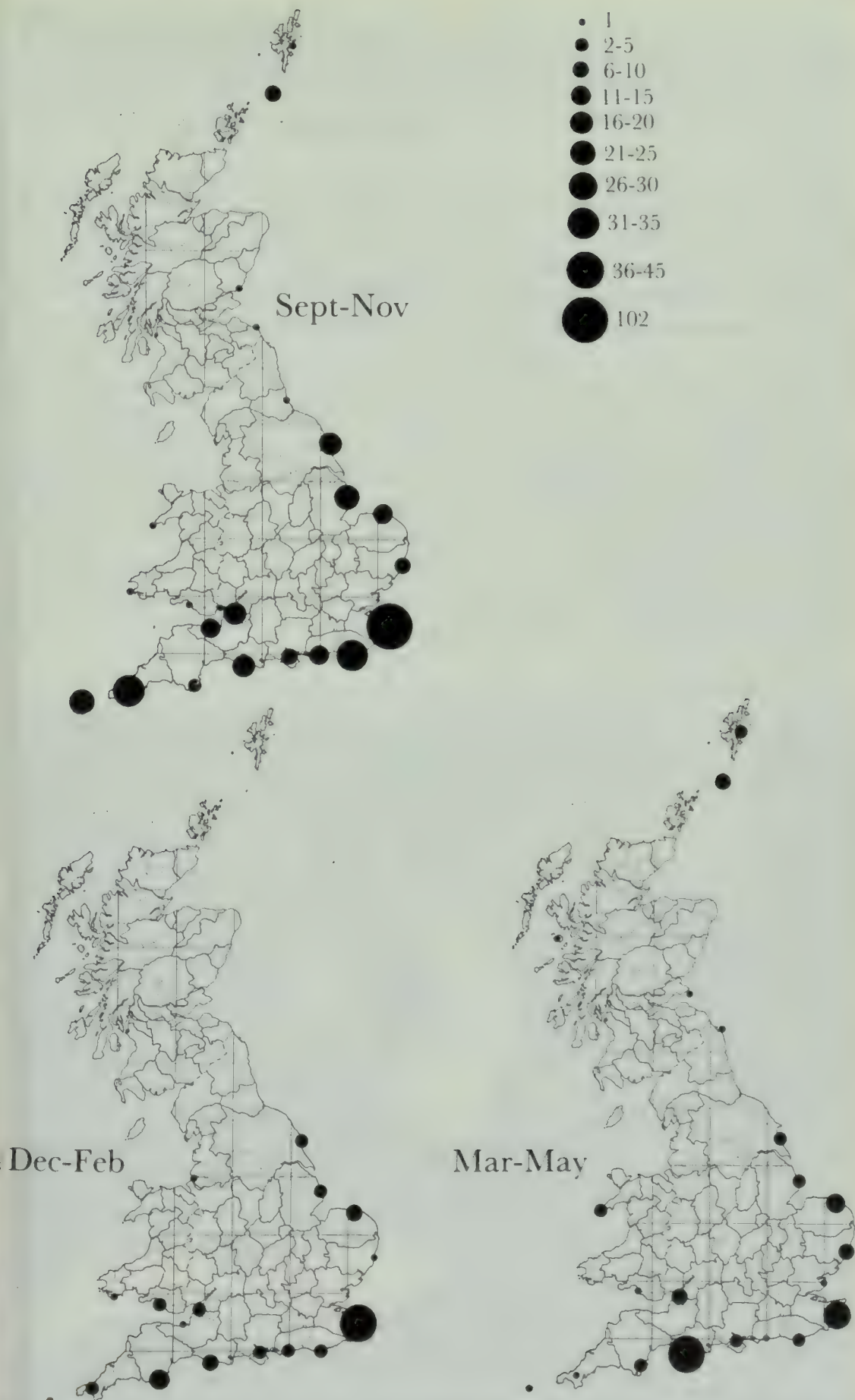


Fig. 4. Occurrences during three three-month periods of Woodlarks *Lullula arborea* on the coast of Britain during 1968-83



to form small flocks. Then, during September and October, most of the breeding areas, particularly the heathlands and the Breckland forests, are deserted. At some sites in Devon and Cornwall, however, and at some tree nursery sites in Hampshire and Surrey, Woodlarks are present throughout the year.

Inland observations of Woodlarks flying over are few except in the Hampshire/Surrey border area, where there have been 36 such records during 1974-82. Dates range from 15th September to 9th November, and most were flying south or southwest (Clark 1984).

Precisely how British breeding Woodlarks are distributed in winter will probably remain a matter for speculation until there are ringing recoveries. The evidence we have to date suggests that those from Breckland migrate, possibly leaving Britain in autumn and returning in spring, and that some from Hampshire/Surrey migrate but others remain within a few kilometres of the breeding sites. The paucity of migrants on the south coast of Devon (fig. 4), and the fact that there are many records for Devon of Woodlarks remaining in the same area throughout the year, suggest that the breeding population of this county may be even more sedentary. Thus, the tendency to migrate would appear to increase from west to east. This is very likely a result of lower winter temperatures in eastern England compared with the more maritime climate of the Southwest.

### Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the BTO for permission to make use of the provisional *Winter Atlas* map (fig. 2) and to Dr P. Lack for preparing it for publication. I am also grateful to R. A. Hoblyn for providing details of his Breckland survey and to Dr S. J. Tyler, Mrs S. D. Cobban, N. Elkins, I. Dawson and A. W. G. John for assistance and advice.

### Summary

A review of information published in the relevant county bird reports shows that the breeding population of Woodlarks *Lullula arborea* in Britain declined from 200-450 pairs in 1968-72 to 160-180 pairs in 1975, rose to 400-430 pairs in 1981, and then dropped again to 210-230 pairs in 1983. Reasons for these changes are discussed. Availability of suitable habitat is considered to be the key factor. Many breeding sites are deserted in winter. A small passage is noted at various coastal sites during spring and autumn. The winter population appears to be much reduced compared with the breeding season. These factors are advanced as reasons for regarding British breeding Woodlarks as partial migrants.

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# Personalities

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## 33 John R. Mather

**J**ohnnie Mather (he has never lost the familiar title) was showing an interest in birds by the age of nine, building up a childhood collection which no longer exists. The 'magpie instinct' has not declined, and now he is an avid collector of bird and mammal skins (found dead), doves and pheasants (kept alive), and expensive ornithological literature (shown off with pride).

Born at Summerbridge, in Nidderdale, Yorkshire, he moved with his parents to Knaresborough, where he has lived since. He attended the Harrogate College of Art, where his flair for good design was fostered, and then, in 1946, joined a signmaking firm. In his early days, he acted as tea boy; like all good tea boys, and typical of his drive and enthusiasm, he became the owner of that same firm. In 1985, business circumstances dictated a link with a larger organisation.

His first trip abroad was in 1956, as a result of the Suez Crisis; he and his Commanding Officer birdwatched together in the Canal Zone. Since then, he has travelled widely, including ten trips to various parts of Europe, five

67. John R. Mather (*Tennant Brown Photography*)





to Africa, three to North America and three to India and Nepal. His first African trip (in 1974) was the result of winning 21,000 miles of free travel on Hughie Green's ITV quiz show, 'The Sky's the Limit', answering questions on ornithology.

With all these trips, his 'life list' has increased dramatically, as has his splendid collection of bird and mammal skins, which today tops 2,000 bird and 400 mammal specimens.

His home in Knaresborough, which he had built in 1960, was a typical detached bungalow until his collection of bird skins and his involvement in matters ornithological at both local and national level made the addition of the 'Mather Bird Room' an absolute necessity. Latterly, a further extension has been added, reflecting his other attributes of good designer, expert entertainer and gourmet. '44 Aspin Lane' changed to become 'Eagle Lodge', and a superb Golden Eagle glowers at you from its antique glass case as you enter.

His climb up the ornithological ladder began in the late 1940s, when he became a member of the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union; his name first appeared among the accredited observers (a small and select band in those days) in 1951; he was appointed recorder for Watsonian Vice County 64 (Yorkshire is so large that it incorporates five Vice Counties, each the size of many other full counties) in 1962; he became the Reports Committee's chairman in 1964; and had responsibility for editing the county bird reports for 1970-79; he remains the chairman. Thirty years of involvement with the YNU was rewarded in 1982 by his election to its presidency.

In 1950, John set up the Knaresborough Ringing Station on some waste ground bordering the River Nidd and nextdoor to a sewage-works. The Station's main activity has always been the study of migrating warblers in July and August, and the 100,000th bird was caught and ringed in August 1981. In 1965, he bought the land, and created a nature reserve: not just a good place to erect traps and mist-nets, but an area where beetles, moths, snails and flowers are all known and given good management to permit them to prosper on this small patch.

He has served on the BTO's Ringing & Migration Committee, and was a member of the *British Birds* Rarities Committee from 1976 to 1984. The Committee met at Eagle Lodge in March 1982 (*Brit. Birds* 75: 337, plate 121) and in June 1983. His major opus in print was, until this year, the detailed and careful work which he carried out with David M. Burn on the identification of White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*, and the associated review of past records (*Brit. Birds* 67: 258-296). The publication, scheduled for spring 1986, of his *The Birds of Yorkshire* will be the culmination of a long and active involvement with the birds of the county of his birth.

Much of this would not have been possible had not his wife, Bunty, been a lady of such infinite patience, placid at all times and always tolerant of John's oft erratic and unpredictable comings and goings on various bird-watching duties.

Never conventional, in so many ways: his luggage is always scanty (pyjamas are never included); offbeat in his dress (I have yet to see him wear a tie); with a delightful sense of humour and an ability to meet all and

sundry at whatever level; Johnnie Mather is the best of companions. If you visit Eagle Lodge, you will be most welcome, and as you walk across the green sward of the garden and orchard, you could well be approached by a Lesser White-fronted Goose or a Silver Pheasant. ATHOL J. WALLIS

## Mystery photographs



**111** The combination of small size (evident from the relative proportions of the eye, head and bill), blackish cap and ear-spot, and small, all-dark bill on the left-hand gull in last month's photograph (plate 50, repeated here) should have pointed straight to Little Gull *Larus minutus*. From the obviously fresh and unworn state of the outer primaries, and the black subterminal marks on these feathers it can be deduced that it has recently completed its full autumn moult from first-summer plumage: it is now in second-winter plumage. The other gull might give the impression of being larger, perhaps suggesting Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, an identification apparently supported by the dark bar on the upper mantle which used to be enshrined in the literature as a diagnostic feature of immatures of the species. It is, however, another Little Gull, this one near the end of its moult from juvenile to first-winter plumage. At this transitional stage, Little Gull invariably shows this Kittiwake-like bar, as first pointed out by Thomas Ennis in 1969 (*Brit. Birds* 62: 234-237), yet this potentially confusing fact is



still not covered in recent field guides. An extra small point is that the bar on Kittiwake is on the lower hindneck, whereas it is on the upper mantle on Little Gull. The bar may be present on late-moulting Little Gulls as late as November, but eventually disappears when the moult to first-winter is completed. Any impression of larger size would be the result of size-illusion (*Brit. Birds* 76: 327-334). In any case, the black on the wing-coverts is too extensive for Kittiwake, which would also never show any black on the crown or on the retained juvenile scapulars as does this individual.

Knowledge of the moult-timing of Little Gull would have indicated that this combination of plumages could be encountered only between August and November. This pleasing and useful photograph was in fact taken in the Netherlands in October 1979 by P. Munsterman. PJG



69. Mystery photograph 112. Identify the species. Answer next month

## PhotoSpot

### 19. Hooded Wheatear

The Hooded Wheatear *Oenanthe monacha* is one of the rarest and least-known species breeding in the western Palearctic. It haunts the most desolate and silent of desert places—ravines and rocky wadis—but, contrary to the



70. Male Hooded Wheatear *Oenanthe monacha*, Oman, March 1985 (G. Bundy)

statement by Meinertzhagen (1930, *Nichol's Birds of Egypt*), it does not completely shun habitations. Pairs breed in buildings by cultivation in southern Saudi Arabia and around small, desert settlements in Oman and Israel. They visit water troughs, and feed on large ticks (Ixodidae) on camels and other livestock (plate 70). Hooded Wheatears are usually silent and elusive: their rattling calls are uttered during territorial disputes, but the song—a brief, throaty, thrush-like warble, lasting about two seconds—is heard only infrequently. Males more often advertise their presence by chasing insects in the air, flashing black and white against a sand-coloured background. In these flycatching flights, the bird may fly straight up, to 50 or even 100 m, in pursuit of high-flying prey, this specialised feeding method allowing Hooded to inhabit areas without undue direct competition for food with other insectivorous desert species. The clear-cut black upperparts and contrasting white belly and white-sided tail show up spectacularly during these vertical-take-off aerial excursions, and, indeed, this slim, long-billed bird is perhaps the most handsome and graceful of all the wheatears. Its fondness for remote and desolate places often makes it





71. Male Hooded Wheatear *Oenanthe monacha*, Oman, March 1985 (G. Bundy)

72. Male Hooded Wheatear *Oenanthe monacha*, Oman, March 1985 (G. Bundy)

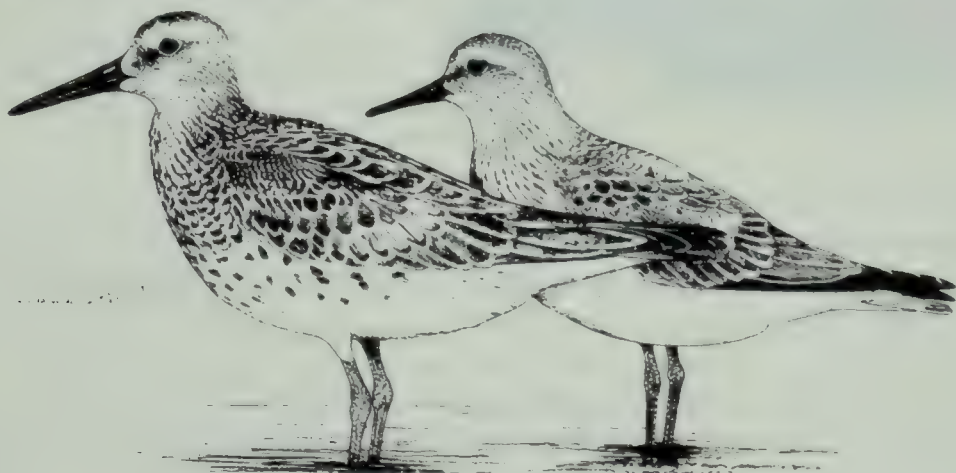


difficult to find, although a male may sometimes approach very closely to observers entering his feeding or breeding territory, but then—inquisitiveness satisfied—fly a kilometre or more, to some distant cliff face or rocky outcrop and elude all further attempts at observation.

This elegant, elusive inhabitant of wild, dramatic places is but one of the 14 species of west Palearctic wheatears shortly to be covered in *British Birds* in a major identification feature written by Peter Clement and illustrated by Alan Harris.

GRAHAM BUNDY and J. T. R. SHARROCK  
*The Crest, Blythe Shute, Chale, Isle of Wight PO38 2HJ*

## Identification, habits and status of Great Knot



*John H. Marchant*

**A**mong Arctic waders, the Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* is surely one of the least known and most obscure. It is very surprising that this can be said of a member of the well-studied and popular genus *Calidris*, especially one of conspicuously large size (it is marginally the largest), with unusually distinctive colours and patterns in adult summer and juvenile plumages, and with long migrations. The main reason for its relative obscurity is probably its remoteness: its breeding, non-breeding and migratory ranges, although spanning a large sector of the globe, lie almost entirely within regions seldom visited by western ornithologists (relatively few have seen the species). Further, it has usually been considered as scarce, even within its core of distribution.

Until recently, information on the Great Knot was accessible to most of us only through regional field guides to Oriental and Australasian countries. Inconsistent, brief, or even wrong treatment in some of these has





73. Adult Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* and juvenile Knot *C. canutus*, Australia, October 1982  
(John Marchant)

led, however, to considerable confusion in the past. For example, the underparts of Great Knot are never reddish, as pictured in Lekagul & Cronin (1974). The 'Eastern Knot' *C. tenuirostris* described in the Indian Handbook (Ali & Ripley 1969) invites confusion with 'Eastern Knot' *C. canutus rogersi* described for New Zealand (Falla, Sibson & Turbott 1966, altered in recent edition). Knotty problems indeed!

The Great Knot has been listed as a West Palearctic bird only since the publication of a record in Morocco in 1980 (Lister 1981). It is thus not surprising that, unlike nearly all of its congeners, the species has never previously featured in an identification paper in this journal. Indeed, I can find mention of it in *British Birds* on only four previous occasions: first, in a 1955 review (*Brit. Birds* 48: 316) of Dementiev & Gladkov (1951), and most substantially by Prater & Grant (1982), who included photographs of an adult at the nest and a juvenile. The Moroccan record caused a hurried addition to the list of species to be covered by *BWP* vol. 3 (Cramp & Simmons 1983). Appearance in that prestigious and widely available textbook enabled many to read an authoritative text on Great Knot for the first time. It is unfortunate, therefore, that the accompanying plate does not do justice to a well-researched text: it gives a misleading impression of shapes and plumages, and, indeed, tends to compound earlier confusion over this bird's appearance rather than dispel it.

The present paper originates from research into the habits, distribution and field characters of all the world's waders carried out by Tony Prater and myself for our BTO guide (Prater, Marchant & Vuorinen 1977) and subsequently for *Shorebirds—an identification guide to the waders of the world*

(Hayman, Marchant & Prater 1986). This has involved museum studies, the collection of photographs, literature searching, and also fieldwork. In October–November 1982, I was fortunate enough to visit several wader localities in northern and eastern Australia and saw many hundreds of Great Knots, including several in the hand, cannon-netted by the Victorian Wader Study Group. The colour plate by Peter Hayman, reproduced from *Shorebirds*, though not faultless, has been painted with extreme care in respect of both structure and fine details of plumage (fig. 1). We hope it will overcome any mistaken impressions derived from previous work, and untangle some of the ‘knotty problems’.

### Separation from Knot

Feeding action, flocking behaviour and habitat choice are all very similar to those of Knot (Red Knot) *C. canutus*, with which Great Knot is usually associated in Indonesia and Australia. There is little doubt that many Great Knots in this part of the world (and perhaps elsewhere) still go undetected in large flocks of its smaller relative.

### Size

Great Knot is larger and bulkier on average, but there is considerable overlap in both wing and tail measurements, as well as in weight. Size is likely to be useful only in mixed flocks, when most Great Knots will be obviously taller and longer-bodied than Knot, and with a greater wingspan in flight. Both species are likely to seem very large compared with other calidrids. Thus, it would be unwise to attach too much importance to apparent size when attempting to identify a possible vagrant.

### Shape

The shape of Great Knot differs clearly and consistently from that of Knot. The chest is conspicuously deeper and the profiles of both the back and the belly flatter, coming to a more acute point at the wingtips and tail: the general appearance is much less rounded than the typical Knot (plates 78 and 79). The head looks proportionately smaller. Shape and proportions of head and body, together with the long bill, may suggest an outsize Dunlin *C. alpina*. In flight, Great Knot appears longer-winged and less compact than does Knot.

### Bill shape

The bill is longer than that of Knot, usually obviously so: measurements suggest no overlap. The difference is sufficiently clear always to draw the attention of a critical observer. The name ‘*tenuirostris*’ means ‘thin-billed’, but the bill is actually not thinner than that of the smaller species; it does, however, appear thinner towards the tip (in proportion to its length) (see plates 73 and 74).

### Wingbar

Weaker than on Knot, but still readily visible on close views. As on Knot, the wingbar is composed of white at tips of greater and greater primary





74. Knot *Calidris canutus* and Great Knot *C. tenuirostris*, both adult, Australia, October 1982  
(John Marchant)

coverts, together with white shafts to the primaries and a little white on the outer webs of the inner primaries, but the white covert-tips are narrower: white on the outer greater covert measures about 4mm, with about 26mm of dark secondary protruding beyond that, while typical equivalent figures on Knot are 8mm and 16mm (plates 75 and 76). The primary coverts show little white either at the tips or on the shafts, and are often strikingly darker than the adjacent zone of the primaries, and darker also than the median coverts.

#### *Uppertail-coverts*

White is clearer than on Knot, forming a more contrasting patch, never so strongly barred as on some individual Knots (plates 75 and 76). Both species show more dark barring on the uppertail when in adult summer plumage.

#### *Adult summer plumage*

Black spotting on the otherwise white breast and flanks is a ready and absolute distinction from Knot. The spots are more or less rounded on the breast, but become more heart-shaped, lanceolate or chevron-shaped on the flanks. In worn plumage, the spots may merge to form a solid area of black, particularly across the centre of the upper breast. The upperparts appear predominantly clean grey when newly moulted, but wear quickly reveals blackish on the mantle and a pair of large, bright chestnut ovals on each scapular. Some autumn adults, particularly males, show a mostly blackish mantle and back, contrasting vividly with a blaze of almost unmarked chestnut on the scapulars.



75. Adult Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, in wing moult, Australia, October 1982 (John Marchant)



76. Adult Knot *Calidris canutus*, moulting from summer to winter plumage, Australia, October 1982 (John Marchant)

### *Juvenile plumage*

As in adult summer plumage, heavy spotting on the breast is a conspicuous feature, but the spots are dark brown rather than black, and the breast ground colour is suffused pale buff (plate 78). There is often a fairly sharp division between the dark brown and buff of the breast and the white, more sparsely spotted, of the upper belly and flanks. The mantle is dark brown. The wing-coverts and scapulars are like those of Knot in showing a broad



buffish fringe and a dark brown submarginal line. The submarginal line is clear only on the largest feathers, however, and a strong dark brown shaft-streak (almost lacking on Knot) is a more conspicuous feature of each feather.

### *Winter plumage*

Upperparts are grey as on Knot, but each feather shows a much stronger dark shaft-streak, giving a more streaky or variegated appearance. Streaking is most evident on the crown and nape. The difference in pattern from Knot is enhanced by stronger pale edges to some larger feathers when fresh, and by the less-rounded, more-lanceolate shape to the majority of the upperpart feathers (plate 74). The breast is less strongly spotted than in other plumages and shows a dull greyish suffusion. Spotting is present, however, to a variable degree. On most individuals, the spots are a dark grey, but some gain a few blackish spots indistinguishable from those of adult summer plumage (plates 77 and 81).

### *Head pattern*

Photographs of Great Knot in all plumages consistently show a diffuse, roughly triangular dark area across the lores, obscuring the forward part of the supercilium, in contrast to a sharper dark line between eye and bill on Knot. The supercilium is also typically less clear behind the eye than on Knot (plates 73, 78, 79 and 81).

### *Leg colour*

Adults show dark greyish or greenish-grey legs, while those of juveniles are dull greenish (plates 78 and 81). In both age-groups, legs are duller than in the equivalent stages of Knot.

## **Other confusion species**

There are some parallels between Great Knot and Surfbird *Aphriza virgata*, for example in pattern of adult summer plumage and in nesting habitat: they are likely to be near relatives. Confusion is most unlikely, however, owing to the smaller size of the Surfbird, its short, plover-like, yellow-based bill and its yellow legs. The two species have been observed side-by-side in Alaska (*American Birds* 38: 947).

Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* is, like Great Knot, an East Asian species noted for heavy black spotting on the breast in breeding plumage, but has rather longer bill and legs and shows a conspicuously white back in flight. Its behaviour is more like that of a Greenshank *T. nebularia* than a knot.

An unwary observer might confuse both Great Knot and Knot in distant flight with other basically grey estuarine waders, particularly Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* and Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*.

## **Habits**

What little is known of the breeding biology of Great Knot has recently been summarised by Myers, Hildén & Tomkovich (1982). Evidence of



77. Adult Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, mostly in winter plumage, Australia, October 1982  
(John Marchant)

nesting has been obtained only from a small number of mountain ranges in northeastern Siberia, in an area mostly south of the Arctic Circle. Spring arrival begins in late May. The males have a hovering display flight high over their nesting territories, and a repetitive guttural song. Mating is monogamous: both partners share incubation in the early stages, but the females desert the nest shortly before hatching and begin southward migration, leaving the males to guard the young. Broods may travel some distance from the nest to feed on wetter ground.

Outside the breeding season, the behaviour of this bird is apparently closely similar to that of its smaller relative, although much work remains to be done on this topic. As in the case of Knot, only stragglers on migration occur inland, and the preferred habitat is extensive coastal or estuarine mudflats, where very large, densely packed flocks may be found. Very often, the two species flock together on the feeding grounds and at roost. The longer-billed Great Knot is equipped to take prey hidden more deeply in the mud, but the extent of any competition for food between the two species is unknown.





**78.** Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, juvenile, Japan, September 1984 (*Urban Olsson*)

**79.** Knot *Calidris canutus*, juvenile, USA, August 1984 (*Urban Olsson*)



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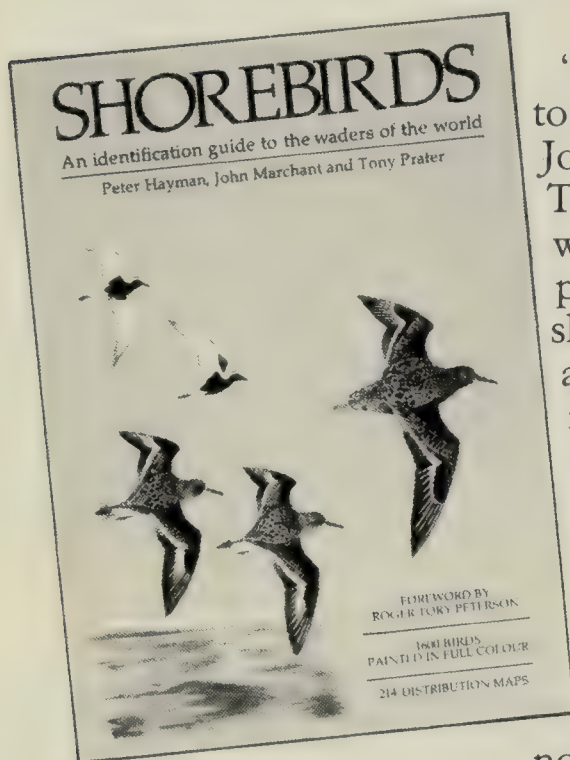


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Fig. 1. Colour plate reproduced from *Shorebirds* (Hayman, Marchant & Prater 1986). 1 Knot *Calidris canutus* a-e adult summer plumage, f winter, g juvenile, h adult winter in flight, i underwing. 2 Great Knot *C. tenuirostris* a adult summer plumage, b winter, c juvenile, d adult winter in flight, e underwing (painted by Peter Hayman)





80 & 81. Adult Great Knots *Calidris tenuirostris*, above, in wing moult; below, mostly in winter plumage; both Australia, October 1982 (*John Marchant*)



## World distribution

The currently known world distribution of Great Knot is shown in fig. 2. The breeding distribution, indicated by solid black, is as yet incompletely known: the map summarises Johnsgard (1981), who plotted 14 sites, mostly unpublished previously, apparently from information supplied by personal contact. The dotted line surrounds a wider area within which nesting probably occurs in suitable habitat. Non-breeding records are regular on hatched coasts, in midwinter as far north as southern China and the Philippines. Recent counts suggest that numbers are much lower west of Java and Borneo than in eastern Indonesia (particularly southeastern Irian Jaya) and Australia.



Fig. 2. World distribution of Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* (for conventions, see text)  
(Elizabeth Murray)

The following records are the outliers of the main distribution, marked on the map with asterisks. They are listed in clockwise order around the autumn migration route. I recognise that my summary of such records is likely to be incomplete, particularly with regard to unpublished sightings, and would welcome extra information on this topic.

**ALASKA** Ten records in total, all but one since 1971, most recently in May 1984. The most easterly site to date has been Nome river-mouth, where there have been three separate sightings. At least nine of the ten records have been of adults on spring passage, between May 24th and June 16th (Roberson 1980; *American Birds* 38: 947).

**PALAU** A few were reported by Baker (1951) to pass through this western Micronesian island group in September, but none was seen in spring.

**NEW ZEALAND** First recorded in 1967, but now seen in most years in very small numbers, chiefly in the North Island harbours, but also more rarely on South Island. It appears that there are no other records from the South Pacific east of Papua New Guinea and Australia.



TASMANIA First recorded in 1965 (F. T. H. Smith *et al.*, reported by Thomas 1968), now regular.

SRI LANKA A group of four recorded near Mannar in the northwest in early 1981 were the first (Hoffman 1982).

LACCADIVES Has occurred as a vagrant (Watson, Zusi & Storer<sup>1</sup> 1963).

SEYCHELLES Two records: a juvenile moulting to first-winter, Praslin, 13th-14th October 1982 (I. J. Ferguson-Lees *in litt.*), and one in winter plumage, Mahé, 2nd March 1984 (W. E. Oddie *in litt.*).

OMAN A total of three adults at two localities in southwestern Oman on 23rd September 1982 (King & Gallagher 1983). [Two previous reports from Masirah Island (30th November 1974 and 6th December 1975) are inadequately substantiated.]

ISRAEL A worn adult in active moult was seen at Eilat salt-pans in mid October 1985 (Hans Scheckerman *et al.*).

MOROCCO An adult losing its summer plumage was seen with Knots and other waders on the estuary of the Oued Sous, near Agadir, on 27th August 1980 (Lister 1981).

SPAIN An adult in summer plumage was reported on the Ebro Delta on 7th April 1979 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 342). The record has now been accepted by the Spanish authorities (*Ardeola* 32: 137-143). It is, therefore, the first West Palearctic record, predating the Moroccan sighting. There is a remote possibility that only a single individual was involved in these two sightings.

ASSAM Recorded from two localities (Ali & Ripley 1969).

YAKUTSK, EASTERN USSR Recorded as a straggler at this town on the Lena River (Dementiev & Gladkov 1951).

## Population size

As recently as 1976, most ornithologists would have estimated the world population of Great Knot to be around 10,000 individuals. Only small numbers were known on the wintering grounds, and Johnsgard (1981) was prompted (presumably by old literature) to say that 'groups of as many as 50' had been seen in Australia.

Details were published in 1980, however, of a heavy spring passage on the west coast of Kamchatka, including an estimated 20,000 at just one site (Gerasimov 1980). This revelation was followed closely by reports from Australia of much larger numbers than previously suspected. An expedition to northwestern Australia in August/September 1981 found 21,800 on the Eighty Mile Beach and a further 17,000 in nearby Roebuck Bay (Lane, Martindale & Minton 1983). In mid November 1982, 90,000 Great Knots were estimated to be present in the same area. More recent and widespread counts have put the total Australian population at 253,500, second only among coastal waders to Red-necked Stint *C. ruficollis*, and approaching three times the number of Knots recorded (Lane 1984). Owing to its abundance on northern coasts, Great Knot is described as 'the Red-necked Stint of the north'. The southeastern corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria is a second major site.

Ten years on, a realistic 1986 estimate for the total population would be at least 30 times higher: in the region of 300,000. It is not clear whether the higher numbers now recorded are solely the result of greater attention being paid to the species. Since 1965, there have been more records from some areas, such as parts of southeastern Australia, which have been studied for

a longer period than this, and many more reports of vagrancy. It is possible, therefore, that there has been a genuine population increase.

Surely it can be only a matter of time before a vagrant is found in Britain or Ireland?

## Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to Tony Prater, my co-author on *Shorebirds*, for his share of the research for this paper, to Peter Hayman for his considerable skill and attention to detail in preparing the colour painting, and to Croom Helm Ltd (Publishers) for allowing it to be included here, and for their generosity in bearing all the expenses of reproduction of it in *British Birds*. I should also like to thank Richard Loyn, David Eades, Brett Lane, Chris Corben and, especially, Clive Minton for assistance in Australia, and Urban Olsson, James Hancock, Roger Jaensch and Stephen Davies for photographic material. My post at the BTO is funded by the Nature Conservancy Council.

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John H. Marchant, British Trust for Ornithology, Beech Grove, Tring,  
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# Notes

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**Little Stints feeding by hovering** The note on Little Stints *Calidris minuta* feeding in flight in Saudi Arabia (*Brit. Birds* 77: 156) prompts me to record similar behaviour by this species in Bahrain. My observations were made in fine weather with a northwesterly wind of 10-15 knots, at a shallow man-made freshwater lake at Sakhir Racecourse. On 20th December 1982, I saw up to six Little Stints hovering into the wind low over the water, with legs dangling and at times brushing the water; on occasions, they would rapidly dip from a hovering position and take unidentified matter from the surface. On 25th March 1983, up to five stints were hovering with rapid wingbeats within 15 cm of the lake's surface, at times appearing to be blown backwards; they were not seen to feed from the surface, but they were probably taking insects while hovering.

TOM NIGHTINGALE

*Bahrain Natural History Society, PO Box 20336, Bahrain*

If this behaviour has been observed in Britain or Ireland, we shall welcome details. Further observations from abroad, however, will be filed for reference, but not published separately. EDS

**Hour-long song flight by Skylark** At 16.21 GMT on 22nd June 1983, on pasture adjacent to moorland north of Ilkley, West Yorkshire, I started to time the song of a Skylark *Alauda arvensis* which was already at a considerable height. At 17.18 hours, I watched the bird drop into grass, having concentrated my attention on it for 57 minutes. The weather had been quite hot (about 21°C) all day, with only a slight breeze. The lark sang continuously throughout. No other Skylarks were singing in the area.

ALEXANDER J. BROWN

*6 Blenheim Square, Blackman Lane, Leeds LS2 9AR*

This seems an exceptionally long time for a Skylark to sing continuously. We would welcome further observations, with accurate timings of song flights by this species. EDS

**Wrens fighting in flight.** At 13.50 GMT on 25th February 1983, at Ilminster, Somerset, I heard agitated Wrens *Troglodytes troglodytes* calling. Looking in the direction of the calls, I was astonished to see two Wrens flying up together in an unusually persistent and aggressive tangle resembling large butterflies in nuptial pursuit. They rose to about 30m above an old orchard before separating and dropping back to the trees.

DAVID E. PAULL

*33c East Street, Ilminster, Somerset TA19 0AN*

**Two male Blackcaps at one nest** During the spring of 1982, two male Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla* held territories in the Cambridge University Botanic Garden. Both were individually marked. Male A attracted a mate



in early May, and their young hatched on 7th June. Male *B*, whose territory bordered that of male *A*, was not seen in the company of a female until 11th June, when he was observed together with male *A*'s mate mobbing a Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* which was close to the female's nest. Subsequent watches of the nest revealed that the female was being assisted by both male *A* and male *B* in feeding the nestlings. During a total of 300 minutes of observation, the numbers of feeds taken to the nest by the three adults were as follows: female, 31; male *A*, 18; male *B*, 25. All three adults mobbed potential predators and removed faecal sacs. The brood fledged successfully on 18th June, and was fed by all three adults. The young were last seen to be fed by male *B* on 29th June. Throughout the nestling and fledgling periods, male *B* was seen to sing on his own territory, but never on that of male *A*. The two males generally ignored each other, although male *A* was twice seen to drive male *B* away from the area of the nest. Unfortunately, I do not know whether or not both males mated with the female. If both did, the behaviour would be an example of polyandry; if male *B* had not fathered any of the chicks that he helped to rear, he would be an example of a 'helper at the nest'. I am not aware of any records of either behaviour by members of the family Sylviidae, nor is either one at all common among British birds. The only British passerine regularly to practise polyandry is the Dunnock *Prunella modularis* (M. E. Birkhead, 1981, *Ibis* 123: 75-84), and the only ones in which adult helpers are often present at nests are the Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* (e.g. A. J. Gaston, 1973, *Ibis* 115: 330-351) and the House Martin *Delichon urbica*.

DAVID HARPER

Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology, Zoology Department,  
South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PS

**Nest-building by male Wood Warbler** At about 09.00 GMT on 14th May 1983, I saw a pair of Wood Warblers *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* building a nest in mature woodland at Lydeard Hill, near Taunton, Somerset. Watching for about half an hour, I saw both birds carrying nest material and incorporating it into the structure; sometimes both arrived at the site simultaneously. On 21st May, at a different site in the same locality, I watched a different pair of Wood Warblers behaving in the same way. Both nests were situated in a depression on the ground and on a slope of the woodland floor. According to *The Handbook*, only the female Wood Warbler builds the nest, although in an additional note it is stated that, exceptionally, the male assists in building (N. Tracy). My observations suggest, however, that nest construction by both sexes may not be a rare event.

A. P. RADFORD

Crossways Cottage, West Bagborough, Taunton, Somerset TA4 3EG

Dr C. J. Bibby has commented that 'The warblers are an interesting group in that they show a range from equal division of breeding roles by the sexes to considerable emancipation of males. This probably parallels the trend in frequency of polygyny. The division of effort of nest building, incubation and feeding young is still described only in vague terms for most species. Simple quantified observations would be useful for all species, not just Wood Warblers.' We hope that readers will take up Dr Bibby's suggestion and make the careful observations required. Eds



# Letters

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**'Pishing' technique** For many years, I have been delighting and often surprising overseas birders visiting North America by enticing numbers of passerines and other landbirds out of dense cover and into view by 'pishing'. Although the technique varies among practitioners, mine is to look for a few 'seed' birds—tits (Paridae) work well—and then to begin saying 'pish', loudly, about five or six times over four seconds or so. My accent is on the 'sh', and the sound is nearly continuous, with pauses of just a few milliseconds between 'pishes'. After catching my breath, I repeat the series about two seconds later, and continue the process for half a minute or so. If the birds nearby do not show interest, I move along to some other possible seed birds. The technique, which has been refined over my long birding career, seems to work best when I am alone or with one or two other people, in woods or brushy areas where there is some shade and cover, on windless days, and from late summer into early winter. It seems least successful on bright or windy days, in open terrain, in spring and early summer, or when large groups of people are present.

Several of my British birding friends and others have argued that the technique does not work well in Europe. After testing it throughout the UK during September 1984, I must disagree. I regularly attracted numbers of tits, Nuthatches *Sitta europaeus*, Treecreepers *Certhia familiaris*, Wrens *Troglodytes troglodytes*, Dunnocks *Prunella modularis*, flycatchers *Ficedula/Muscicapa*, finches (Fringillidae), Robins *Erithacus rubecula* and other thrushes, Goldcrests *Regulus regulus* and a variety of warblers (Sylviidae), a Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*, and other woodland birds for close-up views. This was true from the old Caledonian forests of Scotland to the open woods at Virginia Water in Surrey, and from Wales to Norfolk. As in North America, however, I did not achieve the same result every time, nor attract some species which were known to be nearby; some birds seemed very inquisitive, while others remained in view only briefly.

I suspect that successful 'pishing' attracts birds because the sound is acoustically similar to that which Marler (1955) noted in birds' predator-mobbing calls; these calls, which have similar properties in many species (Marler 1959), are harsh, with a wide frequency range, and thus are easy to locate. This hypothesis seems consistent with the apparent scolding and searching behaviour shown by many of the birds attracted. I do not intend to imply that man is the presumed predator, but rather that the sound, as might be given by a real bird, signals a predator's possible presence. Each bird within hearing range then acts as it would with the same information from perhaps a more conventional source. Some historical notes and other theorising about this method of attracting birds were compiled by Tucker (1978).

So, British birders, why not get out in the woods, purse your lips, and try some vigorous 'pishes'? With practice, you may discover a new dimension to European birding, not to mention some 'critters' that otherwise you may not have even known were about.

I thank Professor William E. Davis, Jr, for reviewing an earlier draft of this letter and for offering several helpful suggestions. P. WILLIAM SMITH  
PO Box 1341, Homestead, Florida 33090, USA

## REFERENCES

- MARLER, P. 1955. Characteristics of some animal calls. *Nature* 176: 6-8.  
 — 1959. Developments in the study of animal communication. In Bell, P. R. (ed.), *Darwin's Biological Work: some aspects reconsidered*: 150-206 (175-176). Cambridge.  
 TUCKER, J. 1978. Swishing and squeaking. *Birding* 10: 83-87.

'Pishing' is, we believe, already a much more commonly used bird-attracting technique of British birders than P. W. Smith's letter may imply. The topic is, however, an interesting one which we feel merits space in these pages. Eds

**'Pishing'** When I first did it, and finished up with a halo of tits *Parus* and Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs*, I felt like he who must surely have been the first to do it: St Francis of Assissi!

M. J. ROGERS

4 Pentland Flats, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly TR21 0HY

## Announcements

Sponsored by



**Christmas Whisky Puzzle: the solution** There were 52 species in the letter block set as a puzzle on page xv in the December issue. The unused letters spelt out JANUARY COVER, so the answers to the questions 'How many species are there here? And what was in the black box?' were 52 (if you made it 51, you probably missed SORA), and three Smews (drawn by Darren Rees, within the black box on the cover of the January 1985 issue). The cunningly devised wordsquare was

composed by P. G. Lansdown.

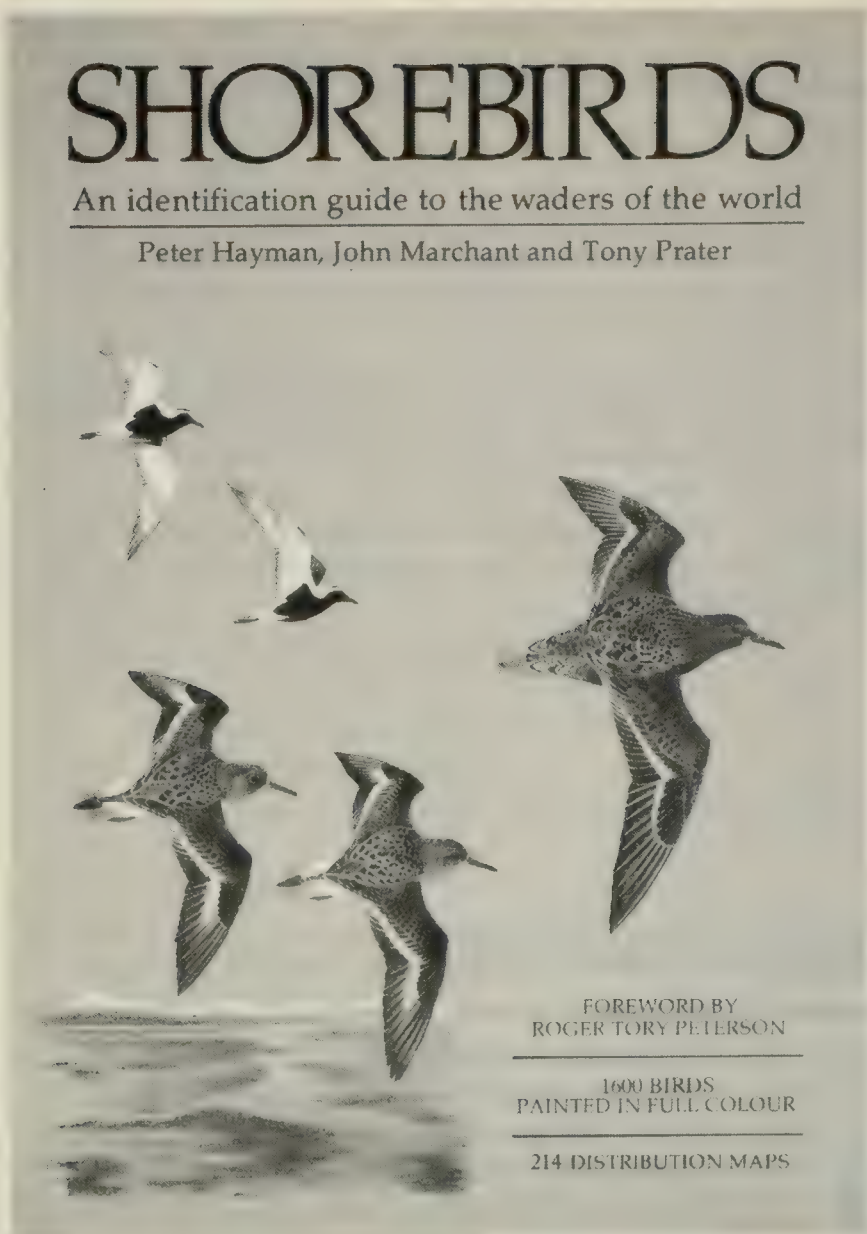
We received 278 answers, of which 41 were correct. The first correct solution drawn on 10th January was from Dr J. R. Ogle of Amersham, Buckinghamshire, who will by now have received his prize of a bottle of *The Famous Grouse* Scotch whisky, donated by Matthew Gloag & Son Ltd, sponsors of our annual 'Bird Photograph of the Year' competition.

**Reduced subscription rates for OBC and OSME members** We are pleased to announce that, in addition to the members of the 78 clubs and societies listed in January (*Brit. Birds* 79: 48), individual members of the following organisations are also now entitled to a 25% discount on future personal subscriptions to *British Birds*:

Oriental Bird Club

Ornithological Society of the Middle East





**THE book of the world's waders** Entitled *Shorebirds*, the book which everyone will want to buy this spring is due for publication by Croom Helm on 22nd May. The authors (John Marchant and Tony Prater) and artist (Peter Hayman) are all well known to *BB* readers. By special arrangement with the publishers, *British Birds* subscribers have the exclusive opportunity to acquire this book not only at a reduced prepublication price, saving £1.50, but also post free (to UK & Irish addresses), through British BirdShop. Copies will be despatched to *BB* subscribers who have paid in advance as soon as the book is available. Please use the British BirdShop order form on page xi.

**'The Birds of Yorkshire'** This new 786-page book by John Mather, with over 100 black-and-white plates, is due to be published by Croom Helm in May at £40.00. Copies ordered now through British BirdShop (see page xi) will be despatched immediately that they become available.

**Palmér & Boswall discs and cassettes** The 15 LP discs or 16 cassettes (in four packs of four) constituting *A Field Guide to the Bird Songs of Britain and Europe* are still featured in British BirdShop at **March 1983 prices!** If you do not already own this unique set of recordings, we do advise you that the price is bound to increase before long. Please use either the order form on page xi in this issue, or that on page xii in your January 1986 issue.

## Request

**Atlas of bird distribution in Sri Lanka** Any observations of birds during the last 15 years in Sri Lanka will be welcomed for possible inclusion in a project to map the current distribution of all Sri Lankan birds. Records, which will be acknowledged, should be sent to Dr S. W. Kotegama, March for Conservation, The University of Colombo, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka.

## News and comment

*Mike Everett and Robin Prytherch*

**Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'**

**Navy to the rescue** Many colonies of Gannets *Sula bassana* are festooned with tons of fishing-net remnants and nylon lines, and that on Les Etacs and Ortac in Alderney is no exception. On 9th November 1985, three Wessex helicopters from RNAS Culdrose followed an exercise with the Alderney Lifeboat with a visit to the gannetry to clear away as much rubbish as possible. Force 9 winds and heavy seas prevented a landing on Ortac, but three men managed to remove 22 sacks (about half a ton) from Les Etacs, in spite of the appalling weather. One helicopter, indeed, was swamped by a 30-m wave and limped back to Alderney on one engine. The intrepid naval airmen said that they had only 'scratched the surface', but the fact that they did anything at all was remarkable. They surely deserved the official thanks that they got from the States of Alderney—and the case of whisky presented to them by the Transport and Harbour Committee.

**OSME in Yemen** October and November 1985 saw the fulfilment of a dream: the Ornithological Society of the Middle East's first expedition, led by Mike Rands and Richard Porter, to the North Yemen. A great deal was seen (including a dozen new birds for the country), much was learned about the region's endemic species and about the elusive Arabian Bustard *Ardeotis arabs* and, as is usual on such expeditions, the considerable amount of ornithological work done threw up as many questions as it answered. ME, who was there for the second month, can attest to the great success of the visit. The results will appear in full, mainly in *Sandgrouse*, but also in other journals, in due course.

**White Storks** The first International White Stork Conservation Symposium was recently held in Walsrode, in the Federal Republic of Germany, under the aegis of the ICBP and with the backing of the W. W. Brehm Fund



for International Conservation of Birds. The meeting attracted about 70 participants from 23 countries. Sadly, Professor Ernst Schuz, originator of the International Stork Census in 1934, was too frail to attend. About half the presentations related to the census findings of 1984. These confirmed the truly lamentable decline in numbers of the White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* which has affected all western areas, and is still continuing. Thus, since 1934 the Danish breeding population, now 19 pairs, has declined by 98%, and the Dutch population has become virtually extinct, with the current 34 pairs almost entirely the result of a highly organised captive-breeding programme, as are those in France and Switzerland. In West Germany, the 1985 breeding population was the lowest since censuses began in 1907. This population has declined by 85%, to 649 pairs, in the 50 years since the first international census. Continuing sightings of White Storks in Britain probably depend entirely on the captive-breeding-and-release programmes in Western European countries, as the truly wild White Stork population which formerly migrated southwest from northern Europe, to cross the Mediterranean at Gibraltar, is now considered extinct. The Iberian population, although still relatively large, at over 8,000 pairs, has declined by two-thirds in 25 years. The main causes of decline were considered to operate on the migration routes and in the winter quarters. Detailed accounts of breeding statistics in more northern areas indicated, however, that the White Stork is also under threat there. One solution being tried is to produce—by captive-breeding, release, and winter-feeding—a sedentary population which avoids the rigours of migration. On a happier note, evidence was presented that the population of eastern Europe may have stabilised. The spring 1984 count of migrants passing through Israel showed that 177,201 White Storks passed over Bet She'an in the Jordan valley, while a single amateur ornithologist, counting mainly at weekends, saw nearly 84,000 over Bet Shemesh on the coastal plain. It was pointed out that Israel needs additional counters for the 1986 spring migration period. British ornithologists would be most welcome. (Contributed by Dr J. Frank Walsh)

**Good luck, Val!** The name of Val Gargett will always be associated with Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxi* and the Matopos (now the Matobo National Park) in Zimbabwe:

her incredible study began in 1964 and made this eagle one of the best known of all large raptors. We learn from the 1985 'Black Eagle Breeding Report' (Matebeleland Branch of the Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe) that Val and her husband Eric are emigrating to Australia. We wish them well in their new life, and wonder whether the Wedge-tailed Eagle *A. audax* might be next on Val's list . . . ?

**Take care near Agadir** Dr Stephanie Tyler (of Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*, Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* and acacia tree *Acacia tortilis* fame, *Bird Study* 19: 69-80, *Brit. Birds* 79: 50-51, *Brit. Birds* 69: 416; 70: 86) was still smiling, even after having had hired-car door ripped open and *all* luggage, passports, money, and *everything* stolen only two hours before flying back to Britain from Agadir. The Moroccan police were apparently completely unsurprised that there should be such an occurrence with a car parked beside the road in a scenic area while its passengers picnicked. If even such a seasoned and careful traveller as Stephanie Tyler gets caught out, we must all learn a lesson. The only bright side to this episode is the thought of the Moroccan thieves finding Stephanie Tyler's and Steve Ormerod's carefully collected Dipper faecal samples and, perhaps, attempting to smoke them, sniff them or chew them! (*JTRS*)

**'Easter birdwatching in Crete'** This is the title of a small 24-page booklet privately produced by a birdwatcher who clearly knows this delightful island well. She has modestly added the word 'Easter' to the title because this is the time of year when she has visited Crete, and the bird-list showing her sightings over four years is thus biased. The first half of the booklet is devoted to a description of the island, how to get there, travelling around once there, plus hints on places to stay, food and weather, as well as a detailed account of about 30 specific birding sites. Like so many visitors to Crete, the author has yet to explore the rewarding west and, particularly, southwest coast, but, that apart, this little guide will prove useful to any visitor to Crete keen on birds, and at any time of the year. It is available for £2.50 (inc. p&p) from Mrs Stephanie Coghlan, 25 Thorpe Lane, Almondbury, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD5 8TA. (Contributed by MAO)

**Jean Delacour (1890-1985)** During the entire twentieth-century period of its remarkable evolution and growth, ornithology has enjoyed few contributions more varied, more fertile and more sustained than that of Jean Delacour, who died in Los Angeles on 5th November last. From the age of ten, he was collecting living birds, and the destruction of his collection in both world wars proved simply a challenge to recreate it even better. As a taxonomist, he also collected and classified birds, specialising mainly on those of southeast Asia, where he was in charge of zoological exploration for the French during 1923-40, and on the pheasants and ducks of the World, the latter of which groups he made the subject of a comprehensive and definitive review, in collaboration with Ernst Mayr, in 1945 (*Wilson Bull.* 57: 3-55) which he followed up in 1954-64 with his standard four-volume *The Waterfowl of the World*, illustrated by Peter Scott.

Since his escape from defeated France in 1940, he had worked mainly in the United States and taken American citizenship; he was first appointed a research associate at the

American Museum of Natural History in New York and later served as Director of the Los Angeles County Museum. He continued, however, to direct and expand his notable waterfowl collection at the Chateau de Clères in Normandy, and was an active and influential President of the International Committee for Bird Preservation from 1938 to 1958, in a memorable and entertaining partnership with the late Phyllis Barclay-Smith, as Honorary Secretary and much more. Each combined dedication and professionalism with an engagingly light-hearted manner and an easy disregard of barriers of nationality, age, sex or class, which has helped to set a pattern in international conservation circles. Sophisticated, tolerant, highly knowledgeable about his subjects and about the art of living, Jean Delacour fulfilled a unique role in the maturing world of ornithology, and his happy civilising influence will continue to be felt at some removes by many who will never guess where it came from. (*Contributed by E. M. Nicholson*)

82. Jean Delacour (1890-1985) in Switzerland in 1954 (*Charles G. Sibley*)



**Frank Lowe (1904-1985)** Regional ornithology will never be the same without Frank Lowe of Bolton who died last October at the age of 81. His range of experience went back to the days of Coward and Boyd, Chislett and Oakes, but he kept up with developments and was a first-class naturalist, photographer and lecturer throughout his life.

The continuity of his weekly column in the *Bolton Evening News* earned him a place in the *Guinness Book of Records* five years ago; he began it in 1926, and his last contribution appeared on the day he died.

He joined the BOU in 1927 and the Lancashire & Cheshire Fauna Society in 1933. He was a past president of the latter, with a record of 50 years' service on its council. He joined the BTO in 1945 and was prominent in the regional organisation of its Great Crested Grebe and Grey Heron enquiries.

Nationally, he was best known for his 'New Naturalist' monograph *The Heron* (1954), reviewed in *British Birds* as 'a fascinating book, well written and illustrated'. An earlier book, *Days with Rarer Birds* (1934), is less well known, but is equally interesting, and has now acquired historical value with the passage of time. (*Contributed by K. G. Spencer*)

**'Please bring binoculars to Indoor Meeting!'** Those attending a joint meeting of the British Naturalists' Society and the



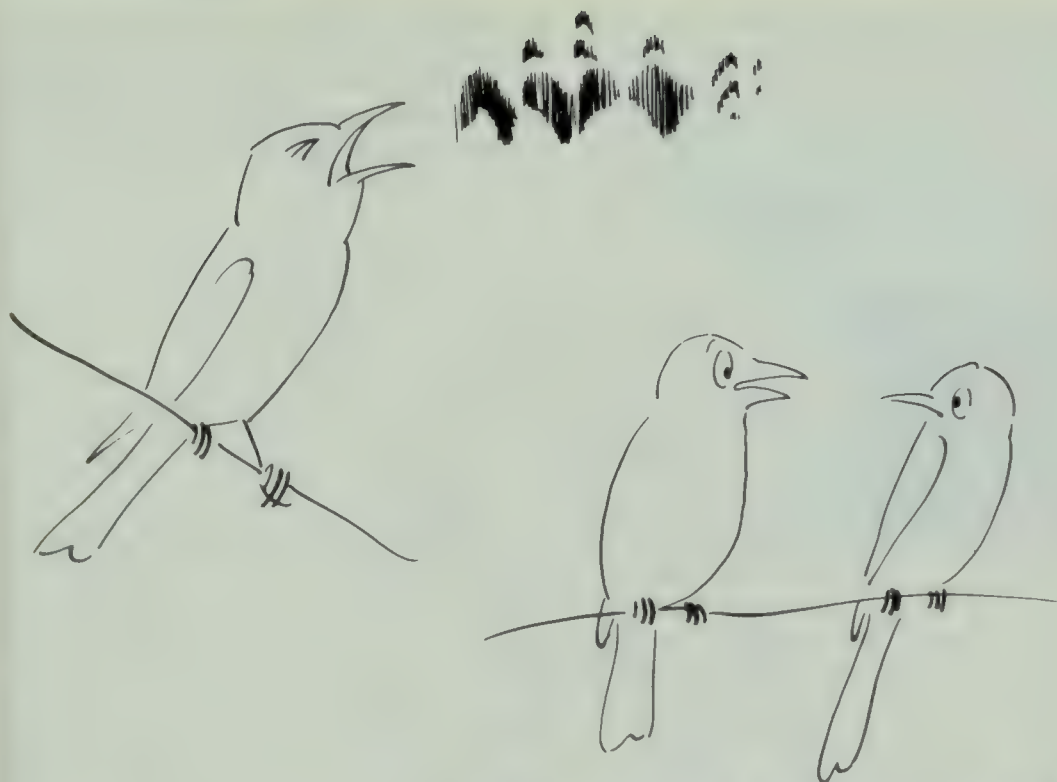
Bristol Ornithological Club, held on 29th November 1985, were invited to bring their binoculars, since the illustrative material was to be shown off video tape on two standard television sets. Of the 99 people in the audience, 27 brought binoculars. Of those who did not do so, 15 thought the suggestion was a joke! Seen from the back of the hall, the films (which had been copied to video tape) were all from the USSR, and were reasonably visible in the darkened theatre. One showed the Little Whimbrel *Numenius minutus*, one the Siberian Spruce Grouse *Falcipecten falcipecten*, and the third the Ibis-bill *Ibidorhynchos struthersii*. The same trio had been shown a week earlier, projected televisually onto a large screen, to a meeting of the British Ornithologists' Club at the British Museum (Nat. Hist.). There were 83 people present, the largest number for a regular meeting of the Club for 32 years: in January 1953, Lord Alanbrooke showed his films to 85 people. (Contributed by Jeffery Boswall)

**One-day conference at Guildford** Over 200 people were present at the latest BTO regional conference, held in conjunction with the Surrey Bird Club at Surrey University on 9th November 1985. Following an energetic flag-waving opening by BTO President James Hancock, Peter Burns gave a most interesting account of heathland management techniques employed at Headley Heath, near Leatherhead. Andy Davies continued with the history of Mandarin *Aix galericulata* in the Thames valley, and the morning session was completed by Raymond O'Connor, who used Common Birds Census data to demonstrate the effect of changes in arable farming techniques, especially winter sowing on bird populations. Peter G. Davis opened the afternoon session with a non-illuminated, but none the less interesting, talk on the Hants/Surrey border Stonechats *Saxicola torquata*. Despite ringing some 2,000 nestling Stonechats in the last 15 years, he has never seen a ringed one on the heathlands during the winter. Peter Stanley gave a lucid account of how ringing in southeast England has shed light on the breeding grounds of our wintering gulls *Larus*. The conference drew to a close with the ever-entertaining Chris Mead speaking to the all-embracing title of 'Ringing and migration'. Before everybody left, however, time was taken for the obligatory raffle draw and the announcement of the *British Birds* Mystery Photograph Competition result. An apparently difficult set of five

photographs attracted a mere 19 entries. The only entrant with three correct apparently entered under a pseudonym and refused to reveal himself, even for a bottle of champagne! Hence, a draw was necessary amongst those who got two right, the bubbly going to D. C. Knight. (Contributed by John Clark)

**BTO at Swanwick** The BTO's organisation improves all the time. This December (1985), it even got the weather right for the annual Birdwatchers' Conference: fog during the main day's proceedings (no fretting about missing time in the field), which cleared in time for the drive home. The conference opened with something of a coup: an address by the Chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council, William Wilkinson, who gave a largely optimistic view of the way things are moving.

Politicians are, at last, heeding the message of conservation, it seems (except in Scotland, where they still have their L-plates on, to use the Chairman's gentle phrase). Mike Amphlett took the next speaker's spot with a well-illustrated account of his Icelandic summer. Saturday was largely 'BTO-in-Action Day': Rob Fuller, Dr Moss Taylor and Tim Davis filled most of the morning with the whys and wherefores of censussing, the amateur ornithologists' contribution to research and a guide to Beech Grove, all fascinating stuff, especially for the many members who have never visited the Tring HQ. Dr Ian Newton concentrated on individual performance in Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus* for his Witherby Memorial Lecture: an hour packed with fact, information and informed deduction. After lunch came the surveys reports, with Dr Malcolm Ogilvie (Mute Swans *Cygnus olor*), Dr Kenneth Taylor (Buzzards *Buteo buteo*), Dr Colin Bibby (Wood Warblers *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*), Dr Peter Lack (Winter Atlas) and Mike Moser (winter shorebird count) doing the honours. After the AGM and dinner—with the awards of the Jubilee Medal to Mary Waller and the Tucker Medal to Major G. F. A. Munns—Robin Prytherch presented two films, plus the Soviet video of the Ibis-bill, mentioned already elsewhere, which needed two showings in an upstairs TV lounge to accommodate the audience! On Sunday, Chris Mead covered 75 years of ringing in far fewer minutes for those who had survived the night's discoing, and Terry White gave the ultimate guide to the under-



"I can't understand him since he got BWP!"

(Reproduced from the menu at the BTO Annual Conference by permission of the artist, *Perry Grin*)

standing and use of sonagrams. Finally, David Boag produced some of the best jokes, verbal and visual, of the whole weekend in his magnificently photographed talk on Kingfishers *Alcedo atthis*.

The usual *British Birds* mystery photographs competition proved easier than some at recent conferences—at least to those who were willing to believe that the photographs were not of obscure rarities—with eight all-correct answers among the 92 entries. Those who achieved this perfect record were Peter T. Bell, Mike Dent, David Fisher, John Marchant, Robin Prytherch, Ann Scott, Bob Scott and Roger Tidman. The winner as a result of the draw proved to be Roger Tidman, who received his bottle of champagne and a Christmas kiss from *BB's* Alison Breach. (Contributed by Mike Lord)

**Cape Clear birds** The latest *Cape Clear Bird Observatory Report* (no. 18) covers the two years 1983-84. Two five-page month-by-month accounts are followed by the usual systematic list (32 pages long), a double-page map of the island, and a five-page report on ringing. The most-ringed species since the observatory opened are Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* (9,681), Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

(620), and Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* (505). These 'basic essentials' are, however, only part of this report, for the final ten pages include accounts of the island's mammals (including the usual sightings of numbers of whales), and censuses in summer 1983 of the breeding Stonechats *Saxicola torquata* and Whitethroats *Sylvia communis* and many of the island's cliff-breeding species (both papers by Tim Collins), lists of the island's inshore fishes (by J. P. F. Wilson and the late C. Rhind) and additions to its lichen flora (by M. R. D. Seaward, Tim Collins, E. A. Bylinska and P. M. McCarthy). Finally, there are very full accounts of the fifth Irish Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia*, third and fourth Irish Yellow-rumped Warblers *Dendroica coronata*, third Irish Blackpoll Warbler *D. striata*, third Irish Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* and fourth Irish Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*. The report costs Stg£3.00 (including p&p) from Jim Fitzharris, 35 St John's Park, Clondalkin, Dublin 22, Ireland.

**Andrew Stock exhibition** An exhibition of recent work by Andrew Stock, winner of The Richard Richardson Award in 1980, was recently held at the Malcolm Innes Gallery in London.



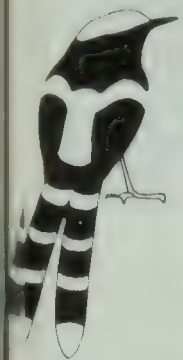
**‘Winter Atlas’ soon** The forthcoming *The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland* is still on schedule for publication in September 1986. A foretaste can be provided by the final version of the map for Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

(see below). The value of the quantitative method (the three sizes of dots show numbers standardised-per 6-hour day in the field) is obvious. Not only do Redwings shun the high ground, such as the Welsh mountains, the



Pennines and the Scottish Highlands, but they are also present in only small numbers throughout East Anglia. Why? That is one of the coldest areas of Britain, exposed to icy northerly winds, but Kent is also a pretty cold county at times, yet holds high numbers of Redwings. Is the answer partly the present-day shortage of hedges in much of East Anglia (no food; no shelter)? The texts are sure to attempt to explain such things to us, but the maps will doubtless contain many such exciting new facts which will require investigation before satisfactory answers can be found. Roll on publication day! (JTRS)

**Second 'Breeding Atlas' before long** The survey for *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* was undertaken during 1968-72. The BTO (hopefully to be joined again in this by the IWC) plans to start a second such project—a census this time, rather than a survey, since counts will be made, not just 'presence/absence'—starting exactly 20 years after the first, in 1988. So, it's only two years to wait before we're all square-bashing yet again. (JTRS)



**OBC thrives** After its inaugural meeting in East Anglia (*Brit. Birds* 78: 308), the Oriental Bird Club met on 14th December 1985 at another eastern venue (London EC1) for its second meeting and first AGM. After less than a year, the Club's membership stands at a staggering 420, and some 130-140 were present for this Saturday afternoon meeting. There was a lively programme, with Wim Verheugt on Indonesian wetlands, Per Alström and Urban Olsson on identification of (mainly) pipits, warblers and buntings, and Paul Goriup on Indian grassland birds, but—as always—the occasion's major function was to provide the opportunity to meet and talk informally. If you have been to (or intend to go to) India or points east, you can contact the Oriental Bird Club, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL. (JTRS)

**OBC spring meeting** The next meeting of the Oriental Bird Club will be held at the Manchester Museum, The University, Oxford Road, Manchester, at 3 p.m. on Saturday 26th April.



83. See 'Rail identification' (J. Marshman)

**Rail identification** We are indebted to J. Marshman for the photograph of a bird taken in the dining room of the school where he teaches, Hunters' Hill School, Blackwell, Bromsgrove (plate 83). He comments that it would have been more appropriate, in view of its name, had it appeared in the bathroom or kitchen. It is, however, probably not a Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* at all, but a Curtain Rail. Are there any suggestions for a suitable scientific name?

**Kenny moves north** We were sorry to hear that Dr Kenneth Taylor is leaving the staff of the BTO. As well as his scientific work, he was also editor of the Trust's newsletter, *BTO News*, stamping his lively personal style on that organ. We send Kenny Taylor our best wishes in his new post with the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

**Ken Rooke** The news of the death of Dr Ken Rooke (*Ibis* 128: 160) is, we are pleased to say, quite untrue! He is alive and well.

**Orielton champagne** At the joint one-day conference run by the BTO and the West Wales Trust for Nature Conservation, at Orielton Field Centre, Dyfed, on 23rd November 1985, 120 people packed in to hear an excellent and varied programme consisting of nine talks. The *British Birds* mystery photographs competition was plugged by David Little, opening the conference, and by me after lunch, and attracted 17 entries. Alan Hansen and Graham Rees tied on three correct answers apiece, and John Barrett drew Alan's entry as the winner of the bottle of champagne. (Contributed by Tim Davis)





**84. YOUNG ORNITHOLOGISTS OF THE YEAR, 1985:** Robert Fray (senior winner), Jonathan Fletcher (intermediate winner) and James Walsh (junior winner), with JTRS (left) and Peter Holden (right), watching a passing Siskin *Carduelis spinus*, Bedfordshire, December 1985 (RSPB & C. H. Gomersall)

**Young Ornithologists of the Year** The presentation of the award certificates and £180-worth of books was made to the Young Ornithologists of the Year at The Lodge on 18th December 1985. As usual, the winners later spent some time in the field (plate 84). This year's competition will again be sponsored by *British Birds*. Members of the Young Ornithologists' Club will find full details in a forthcoming issue of their magazine, *Bird Life*.

**Why bother with scientific names?** We can not resist the opportunity to repeat this tale, told by David Attenborough in his Foreword to the recently published *The Oxford Dictionary of Natural History* (edited by Michael

Allaby, 1986): 'The first time I travelled in the forests of Borneo, I knew no Malay. My guide, a Dyak hunter who, with his blowpipe, regularly collected birds for the local museum, knew no English. So, to begin with, we had some difficulty—to put it mildly—in sorting out where we should go and what we should do. On our first day out together, we were paddling up a river in a canoe, when I heard a sonorous "tok-tok-tok-tok" call echoing through the trees. It was a sound that later I came to know well, but at that time I had no idea what creature made it. I cupped my hand round my ear and raised my eyebrows towards my guide. He then, for the very first time in our acquaintance, spoke words that I precisely understood. "*Capri-*

*mulgus macrurus*”, he said and I knew immediately that I was listening to the voice of the long-tailed nightjar. It was a nice demonstration that those cumbersome Latin names, sometimes mocked by the ignorant as pretentious obfuscations invented by scientists to prevent others understanding what they are talking about, do indeed constitute a truly international lingua franca.’ (Reproduced by permission of the publishers, Oxford University Press)

**Reorganisation at Collins** It seems likely to be good news for all natural history bookworms that the publishers Collins have formed a ‘Special Interests Division’ with Crispin Fisher as Editorial Director of the natural history side. (JTRS)



**Birdwise '85** That was the slogan and title of the joint IWC/BTO conference on field ornithology held at Malahide, Co. Dublin, during 15th-17th November. Any conference which starts with a lecture entitled ‘Flash! Bang! Wallop!’, followed by one called ‘Mud glorious mud’, and ends with a five-man forum seeking ‘A better future for the birds’ has clearly been well planned, with flair and originality. So it turned out. The final panel discussion involved representatives of the IWC, *Bord na Mona* (the organisation governing peat exploitation), the National Association of Regional Game Councils, the Irish Farmers’ Association, and the Forest & Wildlife Service. The individual statements and ensuing discussion were enough to demonstrate that there are still some giant misunderstandings concerning each organisation’s aims and outlook. This spectator felt that another half hour of discussion might have led to serious damage to relationships and put future co-operation in real jeopardy:

in fact, it ended just in time—one hopes—for all the participants to realise that there is the opportunity for very fruitful informal discussion and negotiation, and scope for compromise. Although some attitudes were beligerently defended, the really hopeful sign was that all the five panellists did seem to have a genuine concern for the countryside and its wildlife. That’s a good start!

A hotel providing views from its windows of hordes of Brent Geese (and other denizens of the mud-glorious-mud habitat), sunny weather, and a much-watched Forster’s Tern around the North Bull Island all added to a typically friendly Irish conference. We were even privileged to be shown—after the special conference dinner—films of ‘some endangered North American species’. It was not with total surprise that we found one to be ‘Road Runner’ and the other ‘Tweetie Pie’.

Those of us who attend many such conferences know that a relaxed atmosphere, with everything happening more or less when it should, is achieved only by careful planning and a lot of behind-the-scenes expertise. ‘Birdwise ’85’ could not have been better organised, thanks to Jim Dowdall and his team.

The *British Birds* mystery photographs competition attracted much attention and 53 high-quality entries (you can judge the

**85.** Ashley Wootton, winner of the *British Birds* mystery photographs competition at ‘Birdwise ’85’, receiving his bottle of champagne from Miss Malgosia Trojanowska (Dick Coombes)







86. Mystery photograph to test your skill (see 'Birdwise '85')

difficulty by having a go at plate 86 yourself). Nobody managed to identify all five correctly, but there were 14 all-but-one-correct entries, from Paul Archer, Victor Cashera, Alan Dalton, Jim Dowdall, Kieran Grace, Ronan Hurley, Aidan Kelly, Chris Murphy, Doris Noč, Michael O'Driscoll, Paddy O'Keefe, Mairead Rutledge, Raymond Scally and Ashley Wootton. In a draw, Ashley Wootton's name was selected, to give us our first-ever sub-teenage winner (and Ashley his first-ever bottle of champagne: plate 85). (JTRS)

#### **Birdwise '85 mystery photograph answer**

Don't look until you've had a go! The mystery bird depicted in plate 86 was misidentified as Black-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*, Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*C. americanus*, Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*, Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*, and various other *Sylvia* warblers. The correct solution is White-throat *S. communis*; it was photographed by Marc Raes in Belgium in June 1982.

**'Wexford Bird Report'** The current dynamism of Irish ornithology is further

demonstrated by this report, covering 1983-84, including no fewer than ten additions to the county list: no mean feat for a county which includes such famous and well-watched wetland sites as the Wexford Slobs, Great Saltee, Lady's Island Lake, Hook

Head and Tacumshin, and has always been one of the best-covered in Ireland. This 64-page fact-packed report is available (price £2.50 incl. p&p) from its editor, Oran O'Sullivan, 46 The Glen Boden Park, Dublin 16, Ireland.

## Reviews

**Log for Birdwatching.** By Trevor Dolby. Charles Letts, London, 1985. 96 pages; many colour illustrations and line drawings. £2.95.

One of a Letts series of pocket booklets covering various hobbies, the *Log for Birdwatching* illustrates and describes 127 common species, with an introduction covering stereotyped general information on birdwatching. Nearly half the pages of the booklet are taken up with blank forms in which the birdwatcher is supposed to enter field notes on birds seen. It is one of those unfortunately all-too-numerous gimmicky bird publications which will look attractive in the bookshop and which, sadly, will be bought as a gift by people for a birdwatching relative, or by birdwatching beginners, who are unable to recognise that the book's concept is impractical, that the text is full of errors and useless information, or that the illustrations (some looking like copies of the work of better-known artists) are caricatures which will help with the identification of only the most distinctively marked species. One wonders if the author and artists know anything about the real world of birdwatching and identification. We are told that some 240 species breed in Britain, 'plus six or seven hundred others which have at some time or another visited this country'; that Common Gulls nest on moorland in Dungeness (*sic*), North Wales and other similar habitats; and that (in the description of Black-headed Gull) 'there are two "races" of lesser Black-headed Gulls: the darker-backed Scandinavian and the greyer-backed British'. We are told to look out for groups of Grey Partridges on the ground 'with all the birds facing outwards to watch for predators': something I've yet to see after 30 years of birdwatching, and an example of the strange choices of irrelevant information which clutter the brief species-descriptions. The cover describes the booklet as 'an invaluable aid to all keen birdwatchers': in fact, anyone who knows anything about birdwatching wouldn't touch it with a barge-pole, and those who don't would be better served by a good field guide and a notebook.

P. J. GRANT

**A Year of Bird Life.** Edited by Rob Hume and Sylvia Sullivan. RSPB, Sandy, distributed by Croom Helm, 1985. 128 pages; 96 coloured plates; 2 black-and-white plates; numerous colour illustrations. £4.95.

If ever there was a 'busy' book, this is it. From page 8 onwards, there is no double-page spread without at least one picture, and often up to seven drawings, paintings or photographs, with the text interwoven between them. There is a general orderliness within the apparent chaos, each month being dealt with in turn, but there is such variety, with 19 authors, 11 artists and umpteen photographers, that it is not possible to predict what will come next before one turns the page. Wonderful!

There is a very high standard of accuracy (as one would expect with RSPB-staff authors and these two experienced ornithological editors). But it is nowhere dry, and is just the book to whet the appetite and fire the enthusiasm of a young potential naturalist. The whole idea of this book could have been a gigantic flop, for with so many authors, artists and photographers one could have ended up with a messy hotchpotch. Instead, the variety of styles and techniques has been expertly mixed to provide a first-rate addition to the range of books available for the eight- to fourteen-year-old. 'Brilliant!' was the reaction when I showed the book to a young ornithologist. That's a fair summary.

J. T. R. SHARROCK



# Recent reports

*Keith Allsopp and Ian Dawson*



**These are largely unchecked reports, not authenticated records**

The dates in this report refer to December unless otherwise stated.

Wet, cloudy, westerly weather with above-average temperatures persisted throughout most of the month until 26th, when the cold anticyclone over Greenland extended south and very cold air arrived on the resulting northerlies. The very cold spell ended on 31st, when westerly air arrived once more.

## Birds of prey

The **White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* in Norfolk was last reported on Scolt Head Island on 3rd. The one at Benacre (Suffolk), also reported on the same day, was well seen by many observers until 15th, and on one day it was joined in the air by a **Red Kite** *Milvus milvus*. Another Red Kite was seen at Berkeley (Gloucestershire) on 18th. Reports of **Rough-legged Buzzards** *Buteo lagopus* included sightings of four in Norfolk, one in Suffolk and another four on the North Yorkshire Moors. The numbers of **Peregrines** *Falco peregrinus* visiting lowland reservoirs in winter has increased over the past few years and this month an immature female was attracted to Rutland Water (Leicestershire).

## Seabirds

**Great Northern Divers** *Gavia immer* (plates 87 & 88) and **Black-throated Divers** *G. arctica* were driven inland in small numbers during November, and some remained into December. Tatton Mere (Cheshire) and Rutland Water held the former species, with the latter also at Rutland Water. There were up to 250 **Red-throated Divers** *G. stellata* off Minsmere (Suffolk) in the first half of December. The number of **Little Auks** *Alle alle* seen off the Farne Islands (Northumber-

land) during the November movement totalled 2,500, with 1,700 of these on one day. These movements also involved many **Pomarine Skuas** *Stercorarius pomarinus*, and a few straggling individuals remained along the British east coast; one was present at Benacre on 14th and 15th, and at Sandwich Bay (Kent) singles were seen on four dates, and four on 21st. **Mediterranean Gulls** *Larus melanocephalus* were also seen at Sandwich Bay on three dates, with others reported from Staines Reservoir (Surrey), two on 15th, and one from Roath Park Lake (South Glamorgan). The latter locality also held a **Ring-billed Gull** *L. delawarensis*, and another was seen at Eastbourne (East Sussex) on 14th, and there were at least eight in Ireland. An adult **Slender-billed Gull** *L. genei* was found at Tewkesbury (Gloucestershire) on 22nd. **Sandwich Terns** *Sterna sandvicensis* were still to be found in the English Channel, one was seen on Jersey (Channel Islands) on 16th and another at Sandwich Bay on 21st, the **Forster's Tern** *S. forsteri* remained in the Dublin area, and a **Common Tern** *S. hirundo* was an uncommon find also on Jersey on 29th.

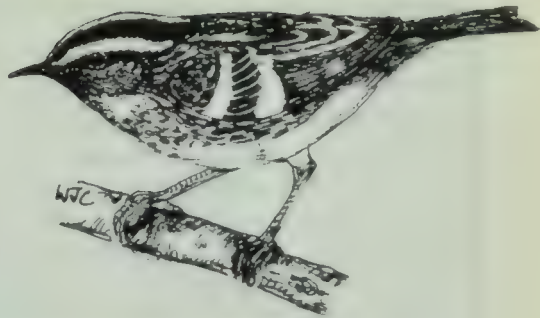
## Wading birds

The **Sora** *Porzana carolina* continued to find Pagham Lagoon (West Sussex) to its liking, staying for another month, but was elusive for periods of several days. The **Sociable Plovers** *Chettusia gregaria* at Sompting (West Sussex) and Blennerville (Co. Kerry) could also be found during the month. **Water Rails** *Rallus aquaticus* were featured in several reports of wintering species, suggesting an unusual influx, and 17 **Ruffs** *Philomachus pugnax*, a species finding new wintering areas,

were present at Rutland Water, together with two **Little Stints** *Calidris minuta*. Another **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* turned up, on St Mary's (Isles of Scilly) on 19th, with those at Old Hall Marshes (Essex) and Alton Water (Suffolk) staying to the end of the year. A report of three **Whimbrels** *Numenius phaeopus* flying over Staines Reservoir on 30th was notable. An interesting record in late December was of a **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* near Yeovil (Somerset). A first-winter **Crane** *Grus grus* was present at Cahier (Co. Cork) from mid November until at least Christmas, and a **Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* was in the Boyton/Martlesham area (Suffolk) in late December.

### Black-and-white Warbler Show

A small nature reserve at How Hill (Norfolk) achieved national recognition when a **Black-and-white Warbler** *Mniotilta varia* was discovered there at the beginning of December, the bird continuing to perform for its patient watchers until the reserve was closed after 15th. The visiting arrangements were excellent, catering well with the flood of eager observers. Many of the latter continued on to Westleton (Suffolk) to see the **Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* (plates 54-59), which, unfortunately, was picked up dead on 8th; it was very emaciated despite having fed avidly on apples. No further influx of **Waxwings** *Bombycilla garrulus* was reported in East Anglia, but there was one at Kirkwall (Orkney) on 3rd, three at Carlisle (Cumbria), eight near Scarborough (North Yorkshire), and one inland at Maidenhead (Berkshire) on 1st. Following a westward movement of **Bearded Tits** *Panurus biarmicus* in November, 12 stayed in a new reedbed created at Rutland Water. Flocks of **Lapland Buntings** *Calcarius lapponicus* remained on



British east coast marshes, and there were 25 at Portmarnock (Co. Dublin) throughout the month. A flock of 250 **Corn Buntings** *Miliaria calandra* at Shellness Point, Sandwich Bay (Kent), was a notable concentration on 30th. A wandering **Dartford Warbler** *Sylvia undata*, seen at Sandwich Bay from 7th to 11th, followed the report of one at Dungeness (Kent) last month. More unseasonal sightings were of a **House Martin** *Delichon urbica* at Portland (Dorset) on 1st, a **Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* at Radipole (Dorset) on 9th, a **Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* near Wakefield (West Yorkshire) on 7th and a **Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* near Lakenheath (Suffolk) on 8th. Two **Rock Pipits** *Anthus spinoletta* of the alpine nominate race on the South Slob (Co. Wexford) around Christmas were great Irish rarities (only the third and fourth ever), and there was a **Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* at Torbay (Devon) on 23rd.



**87 & 88.** Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*, Cheshire, December 1985 (Steve Young)





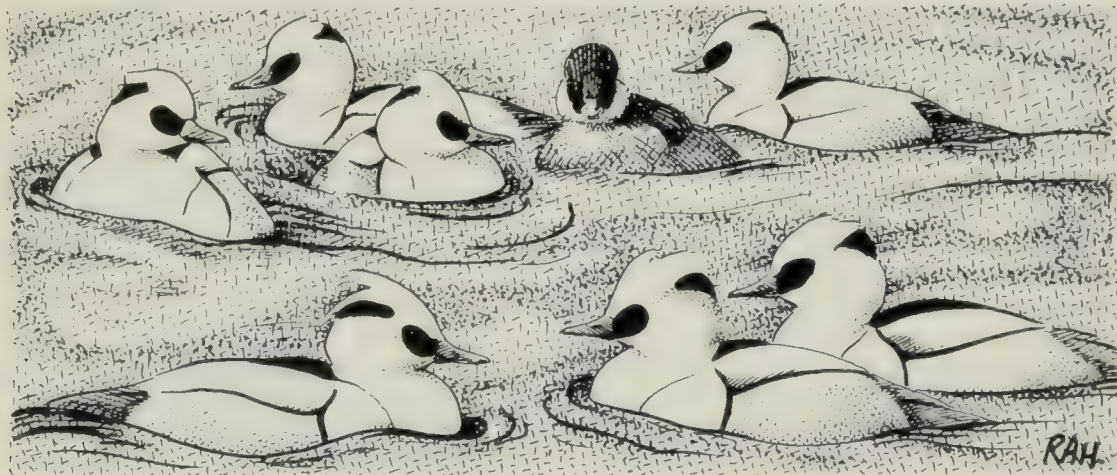
### Wildfowl

With the wintering goose flocks arriving, a few wandered southward: seven **Pink-footed Geese** *Anser brachyrhynchus* were found on the Isle of Wight during 24th-26th November, and there were 14 at Sandwich Bay on 29th. Two **Brent Geese** *Branta bernicla* of the race *nigricans* were on Jersey during the month, with another being found in Essex, and the **Red-breasted Goose** *B. ruficollis* at St Mary's Bay (Kent) remained until the middle of the month. A **Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus* was a rare visitor to Jersey from 23rd November and into December. A **Bewick's Swan** *C. columbianus* of the nominate race known as 'Whistling Swan' was back at the South Slob for a second year. There were good flocks of sea-duck off Hunstanton (Norfolk), including over 50 **Long-tailed Ducks** *Clangula hyemalis*, and several (mostly immatures) visited inland reservoirs. **Smews** *Mergus albellus* were also in unusually good numbers, with up to eight on Rutland Water, seven at Netherfield (Nottinghamshire) and six at Horton Gravel-pits (Surrey). A wild-fowl count of 16,500 birds on Rutland Water on 15th included 90 **Goosanders** *M.*

*merganser* and 1,220 **Gadwalls** *Anas strepera*, not quite as high as the national record count of 1,550 made there in November. Another high count was of 2,730 **Pintails** *A. acuta* at Grange-over-Sands (Cumbria), also on 15th. A number of **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca* were found in the south, at Theale and Thatcham (Berkshire), at Sutton Bingham Reservoir (Dorset/Somerset) and at Slapton (Devon), **Red-crested Pochards** *Netta rufina* at Brogborough (Bedford) and Rutland Water, and a **Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* at Radipole Lake.

### Latest news

The first half of February brought snow-falls over much of Britain, with below-freezing temperatures (not only at night!). There was a **White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* at Ardglass (Co. Down) from 2nd; Cornwall saw the appearance of the following: female **King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis* and **Least Sandpiper** *Calidris minutilla* at Porthscatho, and **Bonaparte's Gull** *Larus philadelphia* at Drift Reservoir, near Penzance. The **Ivory Gull** *Pagophila eburnea* which arrived at Saltburn (Cleveland) on 31st January was still there two weeks later.



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'SHAG IN SUFFOLK. ON January 23rd, 1911, an immature Shag (*Phalacrocorax graculus*) was sent to me by post with a request to name it, and the following account of its capture:—"My son was riding his bicycle home the other evening about 7.30, and the bird seemed dazzled by the lamp, and flew up against it. He jumped off and caught it, and the next morning I cut the wing-feathers and turned it into a very large pond which I have in front of my house. Unfortunately this was partially frozen over, and the bird dived and got under the ice, and was drowned." This occurred near Lavenham in west Suffolk about thirty-two miles from the sea.' (*Brit. Birds* 4: 315, March 1911)



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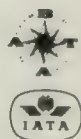
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(BB615)

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(BB638)

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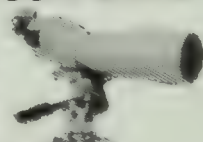
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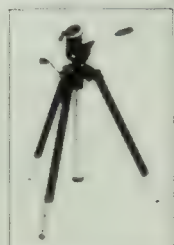
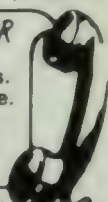
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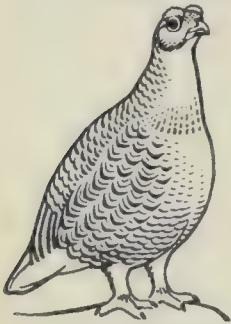
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*Publishing Manager,  
Production & Promotion*  
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*Circulation Manager*  
**Erika Sharrock**

*Design*  
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*Papers, notes, letters, drawings & photographs for publication* **Dr J. T. R. Sharrock**, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK43NJ

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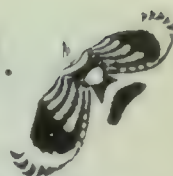
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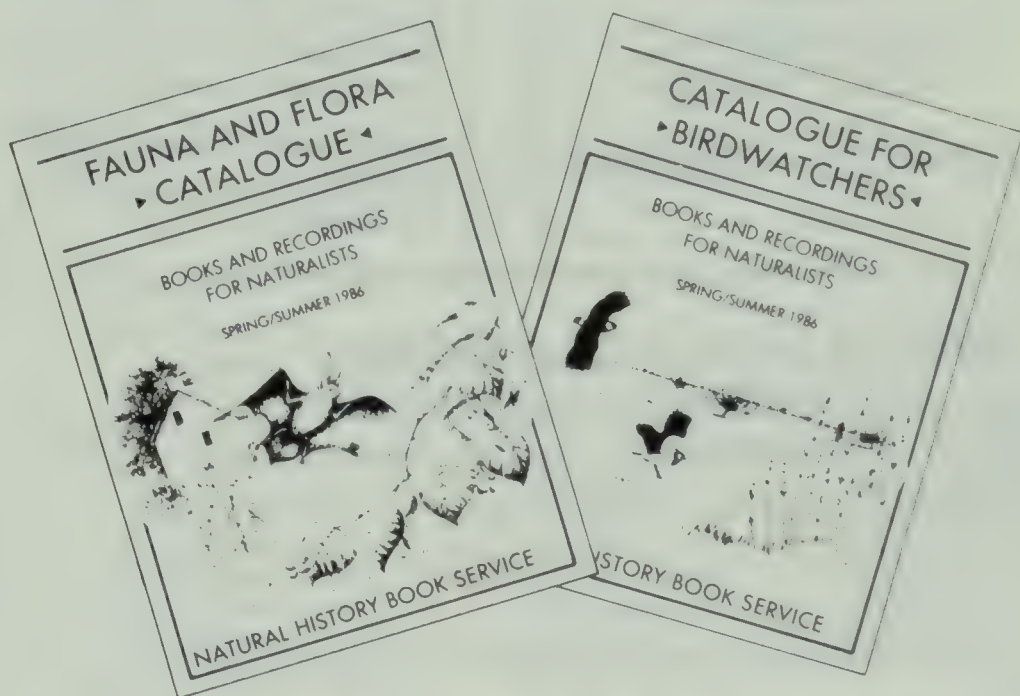
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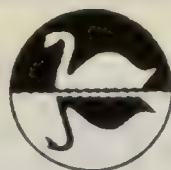
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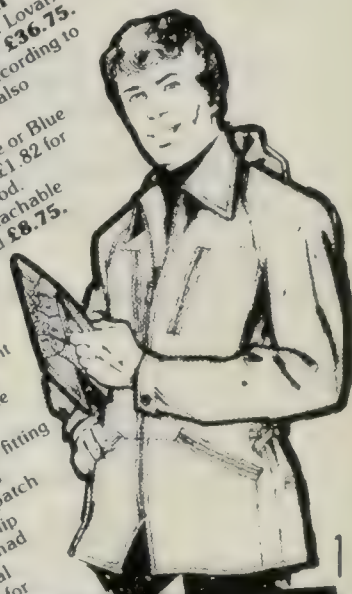
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
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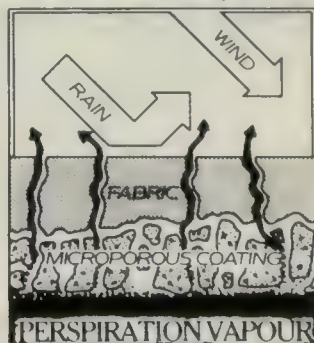
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# British Birds

VOLUME 79 NUMBER 4 APRIL 1986



## Population and breeding of Northumbrian Merlins

*I. Newton, E. Meek and B. Little*

**T**he Merlin *Falco columbarius* is the only widespread breeding raptor in Britain whose numbers have continued to decline in recent years. The causes are not obvious, and may vary from one part of the country to another. The species has been studied in Northumbria for many years, and in an earlier paper (Newton *et al.* 1978) we gave information collected on numbers, nesting success and other aspects up to 1976. The present paper summarises more-recent information, concentrating on population trend and on aspects on which previous data were inadequate. Information on diet and on pesticide contamination have been published separately (Newton *et al.* 1982, 1984). Other recent papers on Merlins in Britain include those by Watson (1979), Okill *et al.* (1980), Newton *et al.* (1981), Williams (1981), Picozzi (1983), Roberts & Green (1983), Weir (1985) and Bibby (in press).

Study areas and methods used in Northumbria, together with other background information, were given in Newton *et al.* (1978). Pairs were allocated to habitats according to whether the land within 1 km around the nest was mainly grassy sheepwalk, heather moor, young forest, or a mixture of open land and young forest. Some nests were on the ground among heather *Calluna vulgaris*, while others were in trees in old stick nests of Carrion Crows *Corvus corone*.

### Population trend

From 1974, all known nesting areas were surveyed each April for signs of Merlins (birds, droppings, pellets, pluckings), and again in subsequent



months to search for nests and to record success. As more nesting areas became known, the number checked annually increased from 85 in 1974 to 118 in 1980, and then fell to 94 in 1983 (table 1). In different years, signs were found in April at 32-62% of the areas checked, and nests were subsequently found at 23-39%. Some 33-82% of nests produced young each year, with the lowest proportions in the last two years. The 1982 spring was late, following a hard winter, and the 1983 spring was very much wetter than the others. Apparent full clutches contained two to six eggs (mean 4.2), and broods near fledging contained up to five young (mean 3.3) (table 1). Four repeat nests on the same nesting area were recorded after early failures; three of these were successful. This figure of four may have been an underestimate of the extent of repeat laying if some failed pairs had moved to other nesting areas for their second nest (a phenomenon which we sometimes suspected, but could never prove). Over the study period as a whole, the mean production was 1.9 young per nest, or 2.1 per clutch, whether known repeat nests were included or not.

Of 303 nests found during 1974-83, 122 (40%) failed to produce young. So far as we could tell, eggs were not laid in 13 (4%) of these nests, the eggs were deserted in 13 (4%), the eggs were broken by a parent or predator in 21 (7%), and the eggs disappeared without trace in 46 (15%), apparently having been removed by a human or natural predator. After hatch, failure in 25 (8%) nests was associated with the disappearance of the brood; in some cases the young were known to have been taken by human predators, in others by natural predators (remains of well-grown young were found nearby). Loss of broods was the only form of failure which increased significantly during the study period (table 1). Minor causes of nest failure included trampling; shooting and natural predation of the female; and collapse of tree nests. Hence, various factors contributed to failure, of which the most important appeared to be predation.

Some idea of trend in breeding numbers over the ten years can be gained from table 2, which gives the occupancy of 88 nesting areas which were checked every year. The figures suggest a generally declining population, with fluctuations from year to year. Regression analyses revealed a significant downward trend in the number of sites at which signs were found in April, and in the number at which nests, clutches and broods were found (table 2). The trend in April signs remained significant, even when the last two years (1982 and 1983), with the lowest numbers, were excluded. Compared with this general trend, in which nest numbers declined to less than one-half in ten years, the annual fluctuations were smaller, with increases in nest numbers between successive years of up to 37% and decreases of up to 34%.

Examination of the population trend separately in open and in forested habitats revealed that the decline began earlier and was somewhat more marked in the latter (fig. 1). This was true both for numbers of nesting areas at which signs were found in April and for numbers of nests found. In the open habitats, decline was apparent on both grassland and heather moor, and on kept and unkept moorland.

One further feature evident in the 88 areas checked every year was a

**Table 1. Occupation of nesting areas and breeding performance of Northumbrian**

(a)

<b>Merlins <i>Falco columbarius</i>, 1974-83</b>						
	No. nesting areas checked	No. (%) with signs in April	No. (%) at which nest found	No. at which eggs laid	No. at which eggs hatched	No. (%) of nests at which young fledged
1974	85	53(62)	33(39)	33	27	27(82)
1975	90	47(52)	30(33)	30	25	24(80)
1976	96	55(57)	33(34)	32	22	21(64)
1977	101	53(53)	25(25)	25	19	18(72)
1978	113	60(53)	31(27)	30	19	16(52)
1979	117	58(50)	37(32)	34	27	23(64)
1980	118	47(40)	28(24)	26	18	15(54)
1981	100	42(42)	35(35)	31	25	18(51)
1982	103	33(32)	24(23)	22	13	10(42)
1983	94	36(37)	27(29)	27	12	9(33)
ALL YEARS	1,017	486(48)	303(30)	290	207	181(60)

(b) Frequency distributions and means

	CLUTCHES						BROODS					
	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
1974		1	10	11		4.5		3	5	11	5	3.8
1975	1	3	7	7	1	4.2		5	8	5	4	3.4
1976	1	3	9	11		4.3		2	5	8	3	3.7
1977		2	10	4		4.1	1	3	3	6		3.1
1978		4	13	6		4.1	3	3	6	1	2	2.7
1979	1		14	8	1	4.3	2	2	6	8	4	3.5
1980		2	10	6		4.2	1	5	2	6		2.9
1981			10	5		4.3	1	2		4		2.7
1982	1	1	10	3		4.0	1	1	2	4	1	3.3
1983		3	8	7		4.2	1	1	2	4	1	3.3
ALL YEARS	4	19	101	68	2	4.2	10	27	39	57	20	3.3

(c) Causes of complete nest failure

	Eggs probably not laid	Eggs broken by parent or predator (shell pieces found)	Eggs taken <sup>1</sup> (no shells found)	Eggs deserted	Collapse of tree nest	Nestling taken by human or natural predator <sup>2</sup>	Female died
1974		4	1	1			
1975			5			1	
1976	1	3	7			1	
1977		2	3	1		1	
1978	1	5	4	1		3	1 <sup>6</sup>
1979	3	1	3	3	1	3	
1980	2	1	5	2		3	
1981	4 <sup>3</sup>		5		1	7	
1982	2	2 <sup>4</sup>	7			3	
1983		3	6	5 <sup>5</sup>		3	1
ALL YEARS							
(% of all failures)	13(11)	21(17)	46(38)	13(11)	2(2)	25(20)	2(2)

<sup>1</sup>includes 6 definite human; <sup>2</sup>includes 7 definite human and 7 definite natural predator (remains found); <sup>3</sup>includes one female killed by Peregrine *F. peregrinus*; <sup>4</sup>includes one trampled;

<sup>5</sup>includes two addled clutches; <sup>6</sup>shot.

The proportions of nests which succumbed to most types of failure did not change appreciably during the study period, but brood losses increased significantly ( $r=0.19$ ,  $P<0.05$ )



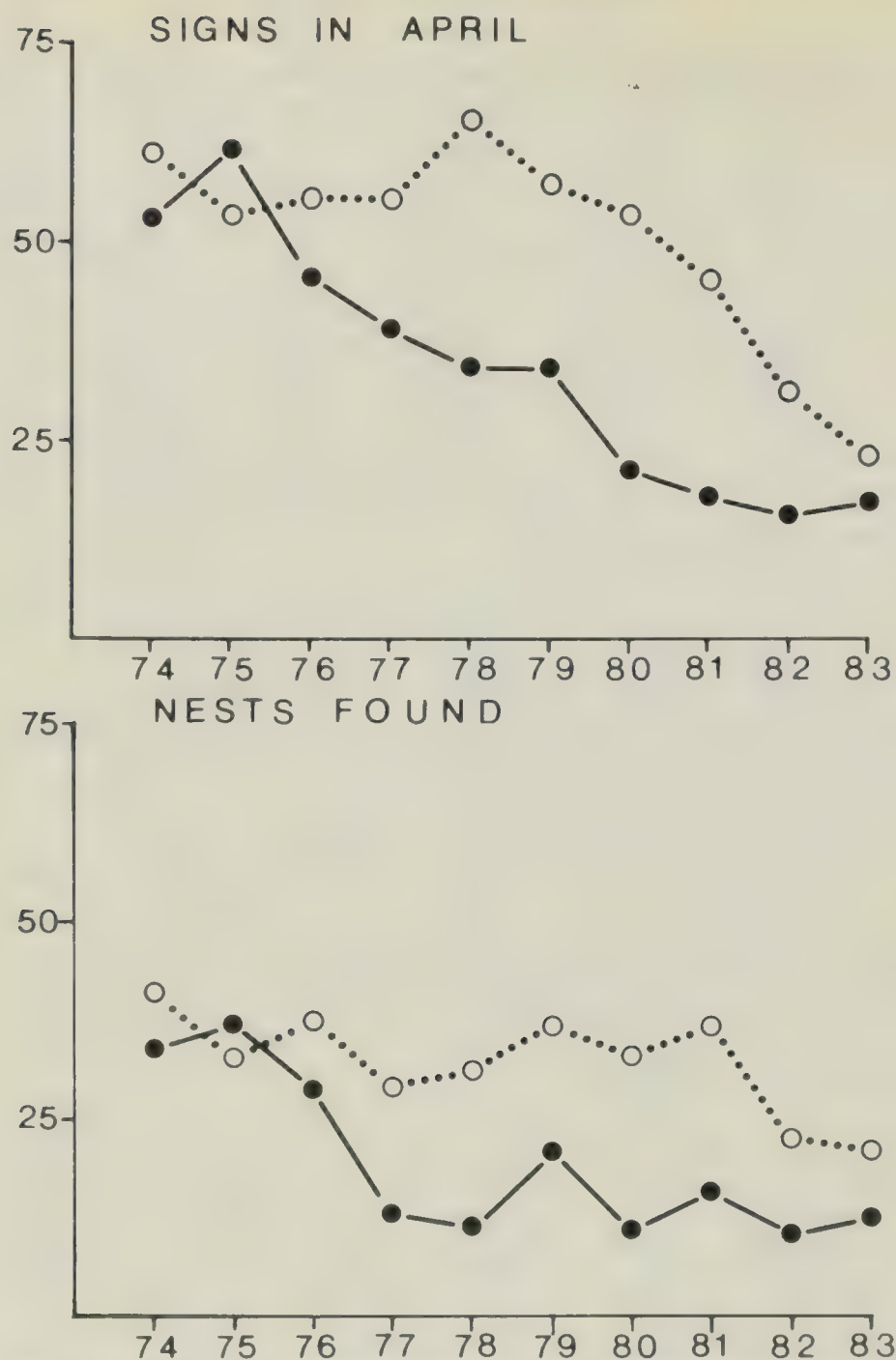


Fig. 1. Population trend in Northumbrian Merlins *Falco columbarius* in 1974-83. Top, percentage of nesting areas where signs were found in April; bottom, percentage at which nests were found. Based on 88 nesting areas which were checked every year in young forest (filled circles) and open land (grass and heather: open circles) respectively

significant decline not only in the numbers of nests which produced young, but also in the proportion. The decline was fairly steady through the ten years, until in 1983 less than one-third of nests were successful (table 2). A similar trend was apparent in the complete data in table 1, due largely to increased loss of broods. Hence, the period 1974-83 saw a progressive decline in both the numbers and the nest success of Northumbrian Merlins.

**Non-random use of nesting areas**

The 88 areas checked each year during 1974-83 varied greatly in the

frequency with which they were used for nesting (table 2). Only one area was used in all ten years, and 23 areas, which had been used in former times and still seemed suitable, were not used at all during 1974-83, although at some of these Merlins had been present in April. The general picture was of fairly sporadic use, varying annually between 17% and 38% (table 2).

**Table 2. Occupancy and nesting success of Northumbrian Merlins *Falco columbarius* at 88 nesting areas which were checked each year during 1974-83**

	No. areas with signs in April	No. areas (%) at which nest found	No. nests in which eggs laid	No (%) nests in which young raised
1974	50	33(38)	33	27(82)
1975	47	30(34)	30	24(73)
1976	44	29(33)	27	19(66)
1977	41	19(22)	19	13(68)
1978	45	19(22)	18	12(63)
1979	41	26(30)	23	14(54)
1980	34	20(23)	18	10(50)
1981	29	24(28)	21	13(54)
1982	21	15(17)	13	7(47)
1983	18	15(17)	15	4(27)
ALL YEARS	370	230(26)	217	143(63)

Regression of numbers on year showed significant downward trends. For nesting areas where signs were found in April:  $b = -3.5$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ; for nests found:  $b = -1.71$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ; for nests in which eggs were laid:  $b = 1.75$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ; for nests in which young were raised:  $b = -2.12$ ,  $P < 0.001$ . For percentage of nests in which young were raised,  $b = -4.85$ ,  $P < 0.001$ .

In view of this low total occupancy, we attempted to check whether Merlins used known nesting areas at random or whether they showed preferences for particular areas. This entailed calculating, for the population levels found, the numbers of areas that would be expected to be used for nesting in 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 or 0 years, if areas were used on a random basis. Comparison of observed and expected distributions showed a highly significant difference between them (table 3). In particular, many more areas were used in less than two years, and in more than four years, than expected by chance; this held whether former areas not occupied during 1974-83 were included or not. The implication was that Merlins showed strong preferences for certain areas and avoided others. This preference could not be linked with nest success, as no significant variation in the proportion of nests that were successful was found between areas occupied for different numbers of years (table 3). Nor did the usage of areas vary with the type of nest site available (table 3). Nesting areas in open land, however, were used significantly more often than those in forested, although this habitat preference accounted for only a small part of the variation in use of nesting areas, and even within habitats some areas were used much more often than others.

**Relationship with nest sites**

Incorporation of recent data made no difference to our previous finding



**Table 3. Use by Northumbrian Merlins *Falco columbarius* of 88 nesting areas, according to habitat, nest site and nest success, 1974-83**

(a) Observed occupancy and success compared with expected occupancy and success

No. of years when nest found	NUMBER OF CASES		NUMBER OF NESTS SUCCESSFUL	
	Observed	Expected <sup>1</sup>	Observed	Expected <sup>2</sup>
0	23	4.1	—	—
1	19	14.9	9	11.6
2	7	24.3	8	8.5
3	13	22.9	23	23.8
4	2	14.1	5	4.9
5	13	5.5	39	38.7
6	2	1.7	7	7.3
7	3	0.3	13	12.8
8	3	0.0	16	14.6
9	2	0.0	15	11.0
10	1	0.0	8	6.1

<sup>1</sup>Expected values were calculated on the assumption that nesting areas were chosen each year at random. Observed and expected values differed significantly whether '0' was included ( $\chi^2 = 11695.1$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) or excluded ( $\chi^2 = 11586.4$ ,  $P < 0.001$ )

<sup>2</sup>Expected values were calculated on the assumption that all categories of nesting areas offered similar chances of success. No significant deviation of observed from expected

(b) Use of nesting areas in different habitats

No. of years when nest found	NUMBER OF CASES IN				
	(a) Grassy sheepwalk	(b) Heather moor	(c) Forest plantation /open land	(d) Forest plantation	All habitats
0	4	6	4	9	23
1	1	6	1	11	19
2	1	3	1	2	7
3	2	6	3	2	13
4	0	1	1	0	2
5	2	9	0	2	13
6	1	1	0	0	2
7	0	2	1	0	3
8	0	2	1	0	3
9	0	1	0	1	2
10	1	0	0	0	1

(c) Use of nesting areas according to types of nest site offered

No. of years	NUMBER OF CASES IN AREAS OFFERING		
	Ground/crag sites only	Tree or ground sites	Tree sites only
1	15	0	4
2	5	1	1
3	9	1	3
4	2	0	0
5	8	3	2
6	1	0	1
7	3	0	0
8	3	0	0
9	0	2	0
10	0	0	1

No significant variation in usage of nesting areas according to the type of nest sites available was found

(Newton *et al.* 1978) of significant variation in success between different types of nest sites (table 4). In particular, tree nests (all in disused Carrion Crow nests) were more successful than the various types of ground or crag nests, all of which were accessible to mammalian predators. The proportion of nests in trees fluctuated from year to year (10-25%), but showed no significant decline during the study period. The general decline in nest success over the years could not therefore be attributed to a decline in the ratio of tree to ground nests. In recent years, predation of eggs and nestlings was the most important cause of nest failure in the population as a whole (see above), and, apart from cases of human predation, was almost entirely restricted to ground nests. This implied that mammalian predators were more important than avian ones. Foxes *Vulpes vulpes* in particular were very numerous in the study areas, having been favoured by afforestation, which provided cover and, in the early stages, abundant voles (*Microtinae*) as food.

Relationship with pesticides

During successive periods, 1961-70, 1971-73 and 1974-76, the breeding success of Merlins in Northumbria improved (Newton *et al.* 1978). This coincided with a reduction in the national usage of organochlorine pesticides, some of which affected the breeding of raptors, including Merlins (Ratcliffe 1970; Newton 1973, 1979; Newton *et al.* 1982). During the subsequent years 1977-83, breeding success was lower than in the previous period, with a smaller proportion of nests successful and a smaller mean brood size (table 1); the proportion of nests that were successful also declined within this period, as discussed above. The majority of failures in this last period were due not to the egg-breaking and addling which were previously associated with organochlorine contamination (Newton 1979), but to increased predation of eggs and young (table 1). There was thus a change in the main types of failure after the mid 1970s.

Table 4. Breeding performance of Northumbrian Merlins *Falco columbarius* in different habitats, 1974-83

	No. nesting areas with signs in April	No. with nests	No. nests laid in	No. nests in which at least 1 young hatched	No. (%) nests in which at least 1 young fledged†	Mean clutch size*	Mean brood size*
GRASSY SHEEPWALK							
Tree sites	65	{ 42	41	35	33(79)	4.2	3.1
Ground sites		{ 0	0	0	0	—	—
HEATHER MOOR							
Tree sites	263	{ 20	20	17	17(85)	4.3	3.5
Ground sites		{ 147	142	96	81(55)	4.4	3.5
FOREST/OPEN LAND							
Tree sites	79	{ 9	9	9	7(78)	4.0	3.0
Ground sites		{ 45	41	23	19(42)	4.0	3.3
FOREST							
Tree sites	79	{ 2	2	1	1(50)	(4.0)	(3.0)
Ground sites		{ 38	35	26	23(61)	4.3	3.4

† Within nest sites, no significant variation occurred between habitats, but tree nests were overall significantly more successful than ground nests ( $\chi^2 = 15.6, P < 0.001$ )

\* Figures based on less than 5 clutches or broods are given in brackets; no significant variation in clutch or brood sizes occurred between nest sites or habitats



Relationship with forestry

During recent decades, large tracts of grassy sheepwalk and heather moor in Northumbria have been planted with conifers. Merlins continued to nest in these young forests, at least until the canopy closed, but it was important to find whether they would carry on doing so as the forests matured. In the previous paper (Newton *et al.* 1978), we indicated that at least two former nesting areas had been eliminated completely by tree growth, that none of the Merlins known in 1974-76 nested more than 1 km from open country, and that even the forest pairs fed primarily on pipits *Anthus* and other open-country prey. Since then, the land around two more traditional nesting places has almost all become forest; one of these sites was last used in 1977 (with signs in April 1978) and the other in 1979.

Of the 88 nesting areas checked annually from 1974 to 1983, 37 were surrounded (within 1 km) mainly by heather moor, 11 by grassy sheepwalk, 12 by a mixture of forest and open land, and 28 by forest. In the ten years concerned, this gave 370, 110, 120 and 280 nesting opportunities in each of these habitats. Yet the numbers of nests found in the ten years were 124 (34%) on heather moor, 35 (32%) on sheepwalk, 31 (26%) on mixed forest/open land, and 40 (14%) in forest (table 3). There was thus little variation in frequency of nesting between each of the three most open habitats, but nesting was significantly less frequent in forest ( $\chi^2 = 29.0$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Evidently, those nesting areas surrounded mainly by conifer plantation were considerably less attractive to breeding Merlins than those in open land, confirming the trend mentioned earlier.

**Table 5. Comparison of occupancy and nest success of Northumbrian Merlins *Falco columbarius* on kept and non-kept land, 1974-83**

\* Includes heather moor, grassland and young forest

	No. nesting areas checked	No. (%) with signs in April	No. (%) at which nest found	No. at which eggs laid	No. at which eggs hatched	No. (%) of nests at which young fledged
All sites, all non-kept land*	817	360 (44)	215 (26)	203	146	130 (60)
All sites, non-kept heather moor	277	137 (49)	79 (29)	75	52	47 (59)
All sites, kept heather moor	200	126 (63)	88 (44)	87	61	51 (58)
Ground sites, all non-kept land*	—	—	143	132	85	73 (51)
Ground sites, non-kept heather moor	—	—	60	56	36	31 (52)
Ground sites, kept heather moor	—	—	87	86	60	50 (57)

Comparison of proportions of nesting areas used in April on kept and non-kept land,  $\chi^2 = 22.3$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ; and of proportions at which nests were found,  $\chi^2 = 23.2$ ,  $P < 0.001$ . Comparison of proportions of nesting areas used in April on kept and non-kept heather moor,  $\chi^2 = 8.1$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ; and of proportions at which nests were found,  $\chi^2 = 11.6$ ,  $P < 0.001$ . Comparison of proportions of ground nests successful on kept and non-kept land,  $\chi^2 = 0.66$ , not significant; and on kept and non-kept heather moor,  $\chi^2 = 0.03$ , not significant.

Of the 23 former nesting areas which were not used in 1974-82, ten were in forested districts (37% of the 27 in this habitat), four in mixed forest/open land (40% of the ten), four in sheepwalk (36% of the 11) and five in heather moor (14% of the 37). On these figures, no more of the forest sites were completely abandoned in recent years than of those still in mainly open terrain (though the frequency of usage was less: see above). This result was perhaps not surprising, as other factors besides afforestation led to desertion of nesting areas. On moorland, sites changed in attractiveness with stage of heather growth, and on sheepwalk according to the availability of old crow nests. Those pairs which did nest in forested districts bred no less successfully than did those in more open habitats, when nest site was taken into account (table 4).

Most of the Merlins in forested localities nested on the ground, but a few used old crow nests in large trees which were present in the area at the time of planting. In 1979, however, we found for the first time a nest in the forest itself. This was on the edge of a 25-year-old stand, in an old crow nest, about 5 m off the ground. Two nests were also found in thicket-stage forest in 1980, two in 1981, and one in 1983. They included one in a small plantation in open country and another only 1.5 m off the ground. All but one of these nests were successful. There were signs, therefore, that trees in the new forests were beginning to be used for nesting, provided that they were near to open land and contained crow nests.

### Relationship with moor management

Parts of the Northumbrian uplands were managed for Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*. Such areas were almost entirely covered by heather at various stages of growth, and were subject to intense predator control by gamekeepers. Foxes and other mammalian carnivores were the main targets, together with Carrion Crows and other crows. Probably few raptors were killed, and no Merlins that we know of apart from one which may have been shot accidentally as it left a crow nest. As most Merlins nested in places which were accessible to mammalian predators, it was relevant to compare their breeding on grouse moors with that elsewhere. All but one nest on kept moors were on the ground, perhaps partly because of the scarcity of crows to provide tree nests.

Over the whole ten years, the occupancy of known nesting areas was significantly greater on kept heather moors than elsewhere. Based on signs in April, the figures were 63% against 44%, and on nests found they were 44% against 26% (table 5). A similar difference was apparent on heather alone, comparing kept and non-kept moors. No difference in nest success was apparent between kept and unkept ground (either in all habitats together or in heather moor alone). Almost all the tree nests found, however, were on non-kept land, perhaps partly because of the shortage of crows on kept land. When tree nests were excluded, a greater proportion of the remaining (ground) nests was successful on kept (58%) than on both unkept (51%) land and unkept heather moor alone (52%), although these differences were not statistically significant.



### **Sex ratio of nestlings**

In recent years, the sexes of young were recorded whenever nest visits were made late enough in the nestling period for sexing to be done without risk of error (Picozzi 1983). Males and females were distinguished on body size (weights and outer-primary-feather lengths were taken), thickness of tarsus and size of feet; but at fledging the sexes also differed in coloration (males had a bluer cast to the back and flight-feather tips and a more orange cast to the breast) and in voice (males were higher-pitched). Twenty-six broods examined just before fledging contained 35 birds classed as males and 48 classed as females, a ratio not significantly different from unity.

### **Age ratio among breeders**

The ratio of first-summer (brown-backed) to adult (blue-backed) males found in the breeding population was 1:17 in 1976, 4:16 in 1977, 5:21 in 1978, 1:27 in 1979, 0:18 in 1980, 3:17 in 1981, 0:17 in 1982 and 0:14 in 1983: in total, 14:149, which is equivalent to 9% first-summer among male breeders. Six of these adults and two of the first-summer, however, were at nesting places where no nest was subsequently found; excluding these, the ratio became 12:143, or 8% first-summer. The variations in proportions between years were not statistically significant, nor were they clearly related to changes in the levels of breeding population. In the last two years, with lowest breeding population, no first-summer males were found; but, in the two years with the next lowest populations, the proportions of first-summer were the highest recorded.

Among females, first-summer could not be distinguished from adults in the field, so we could obtain this ratio only for the few individuals that were trapped on nests during 1976-80 and examined in the hand. Including birds more than once if they were caught in more than one year, this gave three first-summer to 14 adults (or 18% first-summer), a figure not significantly higher than that in males ( $\chi^2 = 0.6$ ). The few pairs where both partners were aged included two adult + adult pairs, one first-summer male + adult female pair, and one adult male + first-summer female pair.

### **Behaviour and roles of sexes in breeding**

As previously, the roles of the sexes in breeding were assessed by noting which partner was present at each visit. Combining results from the whole study, in the pre-laying period (in April), both sexes were seen together on the nesting area on 84 occasions, the male alone on 60 and the female alone on 92. Thus, at this stage neither sex was present significantly more often than the other. Of nine Merlins flushed from empty nests in the pre-laying period, one was a male; of 33 put off during the laying period, ten were males; of 230 put off in the incubation period, 65 were males; and, of 80 put off in the nestling period, only three were males. The latter were with young of one, five and ten days, respectively. These results confirmed previous ones that males did less than half of the daytime incubation; they also suggested that males occasionally brooded young.

At most nesting places, only one or two Merlins were seen at once (excluding the young), but on two occasions in late May a second female

appeared, apparently attracted by the alarm calling of the others: a phenomenon noted also among Peregrines *F. peregrinus* (Ratcliffe 1980). In addition, we had one instance of a male apparently acquiring a new mate, after the first female had been shot. The latter had been found dead on the nesting area on 10th May, and about three weeks later a pair was reported with a new nest on the same slope; the nest contained two eggs, but later failed.

Merlins were often seen attacking and driving away other bird species which flew over their nesting area. These were all predators, and included Carrion Crows (seven cases), Kestrels *F. tinnunculus* (seven), Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus* (four), Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* (two), Peregrine (one), Goshawk *A. gentilis* (one), Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* (one) and Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* (one). Such attacks were recorded from the male (15 cases) or female (seven), and twice from the pair together. Some occurred while the observer was at the site, and may have been redirected aggression, but others clearly occurred in response to the predator itself. The observer may, however, have influenced which sex was involved, as the female often seemed more concerned with him than was the male. On one occasion, Merlins were seen to attack a fox.

### Movements and mortality

Since our previous paper (Newton *et al.* 1978), another 29 ring recoveries have been reported, bringing the total to 52 for nestlings ringed in Northumbria during 1961-83. Twenty-three of the recent recoveries were in line with previous findings, as they came from northern Britain within 180 km of and in various directions from the birthplace; all 23 were from outside the breeding season: five in August, three in September, four in October, one in November, two in January, three in February, one in March, three (two long dead) in April and one in July. In addition, five other recoveries were at much greater distance: one at 257 km in Lincolnshire (in November of its first calendar-year); one at 325 km in Suffolk (in October of its sixth calendar-year); one at 460 km in Hampshire (in October of its third calendar-year); and two in France, in Loire and Landes (in March and November respectively of their second calendar-year). All recoveries from outside the breeding season were from a lower elevation than the breeding areas. These various recoveries gave a picture of Merlin movements similar to that found by Mead (1972) for the whole British population, except that the Northumbrian birds did not disperse exclusively to the south.

In addition to the above recoveries, one female in her sixth calendar-year was found dead on a nest in Galloway, 110 km WSW of where she was hatched. Another three females which had been hatched in the study area were later found breeding there in their second (two) and fourth (one) calendar-years, having moved 40 km WSW, 12.5 km north and 20 km SSE, respectively; these were all trapped on their nests.

Four females were caught while breeding in two separate years. Two were on the same site both times, one in 1978 and 1979, and the other in



1976 and 1978 (the site was vacant in 1977); the other two had changed nesting areas between years, moving 1.5 km between 1977 and 1978, and 15 km between 1976 and 1980, respectively (see Hodson 1971, summarised in our previous paper, for site changes in Canadian Merlins).

During 1961-83, 31 ringed first-year Merlins were found dead or dying, ten second-years, two third-years, two fourth-years, two fifth-years, one six-year, one seventh-year, and three ninth-years. These figures were too few to estimate the annual mortality, but probably gave a reasonable estimate of the maximum age to which a Merlin is likely to live. Most birds recovered were reported merely as 'found dead', but there were several road casualties.

## **Discussion**

Despite year-to-year fluctuations, the general trend of the population during the ten-year study period was downward. At 88 nesting areas which were checked each year, less than half as many nests were found in the final year as in the first. Restricting analysis to the same areas throughout the ten-year period, however, may have given a measure of decline slightly greater than occurred in the population at large. While as a rule the same nesting areas were used in different years, certain areas declined in suitability with time, while others improved. This was the case, for example, where large stretches of heather were burnt and then allowed to re-grow. So, restricting the search to any confined localities where nests had previously been found might in the long term have given the impression of population decline, because it was sensitive to the loss of certain areas yet took no account of any new areas, far removed from the old ones, which may have been taken up in the meantime. We do not believe, however, that this was a serious bias in our data, because all likely-looking sites around each known breeding area were checked. The alternative, of assessing population trend from the complete data (table 1), was even less appropriate, because the amount of terrain covered increased during the course of the study, thereby giving the opportunity for more nests to be discovered. Despite this, the numbers of nests found each year still declined.

The downward trend was evidently widespread, but more marked in districts dominated by young forest than in more open land. It was in forested districts that habitat deteriorated most, for, as the trees grew, the canopy closed over an ever-increasing area, reducing the potential hunting places for Merlins and obliterating some nesting sites completely. Initial tree planting made little difference to the population (Newton *et al.* 1978); it was only when the trees grew and the canopy closed that the numbers declined. As this happened, some nesting areas were abandoned altogether, while others were used less often. Similar findings emerged in Speyside (Weir 1985).

On open land, the downward trend was less marked, but still apparent. Occupancy of nesting places was about 1.5 times greater, and success of ground nests about 1.1 times greater, on managed heather moor than on unmanaged moor or grassland. In general, it seemed that managed heather moor was the optimal habitat in Northumbria. This may have been

because only the most productive of the heather areas in Northumbria have remained kept; because the heather on kept areas was better managed, covering more of the ground, with patches of old as well as young growth; because of predator control on kept areas; or because of a combination of these factors. The patches of rank heather on kept areas may have attracted breeding Merlins in spring, thus ensuring high occupancy, and predator control may have helped the success of ground nests. Prey may also have been more numerous—either through higher initial densities or better breeding—or more easily caught on managed heather moor than elsewhere, but on these aspects we had no information. Whatever the benefits of good heather moor, a similar preference for this habitat was found in Wales (Bibby in press).

Events in Northumbria may have applied more widely, as the Merlin is on the decline in several regions of Britain from which information is available (Parslow 1967; Newton *et al.* 1981; Williams 1981; Bibby in press). The decline seems to be of long standing, but to have steepened following the introduction of organochlorine pesticides in agriculture. Successive restrictions since 1962 have reduced the use of these chemicals, and the populations of other species affected by them (notably Sparrowhawk and Peregrine) have made spectacular recoveries (Ratcliffe 1980; Newton & Haas 1984). The Merlin recovered in some areas, but in general now seems again to be on the decline. As its breeding rate is now only slightly reduced by organochlorines, at least in regions where the problem has been studied (Newton *et al.* 1981), some other factor is almost certainly involved. Three possibilities are discussed below, but in a national rather than merely a Northumbrian context.

1. *Habitat in the breeding season.* Available breeding habitat has shrunk in recent decades, and some of the remainder has deteriorated in quality. Managed heather moor, which provides the best conditions, has been decreasing in area since the last century (Anderson & Yalden 1971; Potts *et al.* 1983) and, as sheep stocks have increased, heather has given way through increased grazing to grass; the numbers of gamekeepers, and hence the extent of predator control, have also declined. This process could have affected Merlins over wide areas of Britain. Similarly, the rough vegetation on the hillsides has increasingly given way to 'improved pasture', as drainage and re-seeding have increasingly encroached. The further reduction of breeding habitat through afforestation has been substantial, but much more marked in some regions than in others. There can be no doubt, therefore, that both the total amount of breeding habitat and the amount of optimal habitat have greatly declined in recent decades. Of that habitat which is still available, however, much seems unoccupied. This is reflected in the sporadic usage of traditional sites, which previously were occupied more regularly, and also by the large areas of apparently good habitat which have recently become devoid of breeding Merlins, such as much of the Peak District (Newton *et al.* 1981). With a dwindling population, one would expect the birds to concentrate in the best areas (good heather moor) and desert the poorer ones, but this does not necessarily mean that the decline in breeding habitat *per se* has caused the decline in Merlin numbers. The population may have declined for quite different reasons, leaving much of the remaining breeding habitat unoccupied or under-occupied. Thus, we suggest, some factor other than the carrying capacity of the nesting habitat has recently depressed Merlin numbers in several regions below the level at which they could occupy even the reduced habitat which remains.

2. *Habitat outside the breeding season.* After breeding, Merlins spread over the lowlands, ranging widely on farmland and sea coast. They extend to all British counties at this season, and to some extent south into France. Small avian prey in general may be less numerous on farmland than formerly, but agricultural trends in eastern districts of Britain have tended increasingly to



produce open habitat, of the type favoured by Merlins. Because of this, and the freedom the birds have at this season to range over wide areas, it seems unlikely that the population decline has been caused by shortage of suitable winter habitat or food:

3. *Population dynamics.* If the species is not currently limited by habitat or food resources, either in summer or in winter, some other factor must be reducing the breeding rate or increasing the mortality, irrespective of resources, so that the population cannot maintain itself. Mortality almost certainly increased around the time when cyclodiene compounds were in peak use, but it is not known whether it is still higher than normal now that the use of these chemicals has been reduced. Reproduction also declined with organochlorines, and, although the situation has improved in recent years, breeding success may still be lower than it would be in the absence of organochlorines. The main cause of breeding failure in Northumbria, however, was predation on nest contents, and such loss of young increased during the ten-year study. This predation may also have increased in other areas, associated with the general decline in gamekeeping and the increase in fox and other carnivore populations, documented by Tapper (1982). Human predation, resulting from the desire for captive birds, may also have increased on a wide scale, as in Northumbria. The net result of all these factors may be the production of insufficient young to offset the current adult mortality, and a consequent decline in population.

Nesting extensively on the ground, the British Merlin population is highly vulnerable to mammalian predation, including human. The mean production of young in Northumbria, at 1.9 young per nest, was only slightly lower than the 2.1 found in Wales (Roberts & Green 1983), but considerably lower than the 2.6 found in a Swedish study (Olsson 1980) and the 2.9 and 2.8 found in two Canadian studies (Temple 1972; Fox & Donald 1980). This was associated with ground nesting among British Merlins, and higher losses of young to predators. Adults were also occasionally taken off the nest by ground predators (once in Northumbria). In one instance, an adult was killed away from the nest by Peregrines. These large falcons have recently recolonised the Northumbria uplands and during the study period the number of territorial pairs increased from nil to seven. Their significance, if any, to the decline of Merlins in Northumbria could not be assessed, but they were surely unimportant in some other areas (such as the Peak District, where the decline of Merlins occurred before the Peregrines returned). We suggest, therefore, that it is a combination of factors, including increased natural and human predation and some continuing pesticide casualties, that has shifted the balance between breeding and mortality rates and led to population decline in Northumbria and some other parts of the country. The relative importance of predation and pesticides may vary between regions. To test these views, more accurate knowledge is needed of mortality, and of the proportions of birds which begin breeding at different ages. It would then be possible to check whether the known reproductive rate was sufficient to offset the annual losses, even though the main cause of reduced reproduction may vary from one region to another.

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## Summary

1. This paper reports a ten-year study of Merlins *Falco columbarius* breeding in Northumbria. At sites checked annually, nest numbers fluctuated from year to year, but the general trend was downward. This was true of the number of nesting areas on which signs were found in April, of the number of nests found, and of the proportion of nests which were successful. In total, the breeding population declined by more than 50% between 1974 and 1983. The decline was widespread, but more marked in forested than in unforested districts.
2. Merlin nesting areas were not used at random from year to year; some were used less often and others more often than expected by chance. Those in open land were used significantly more often than those in young forest. No link was apparent between frequency of use and nest site, or between frequency of use and nest success.
3. Sixty per cent of all nests produced young, and annual variation ranged between 33% and 82%. A much greater proportion of tree nests than ground nests was successful, largely because ground nests were accessible to mammalian predators. Predation on young increased during the course of the study. Average production was 1.9 young per nest.
4. Occupancy of known sites was higher on heather *Calluna vulgaris* moors managed for grouse *Lagopus* than on unmanaged heather moors, grassland or young forest. Kepered heather moors probably provided the optimal habitat for Merlins in Northumbria.
5. First-summers formed 8-9% of all breeding males, and 18% of all breeding females. Males did less than half the daytime incubation and occasionally brooded young, while females did the rest.
6. It is suggested that the population decline, both in Northumbria and in some other parts of Britain, is due not to shortage of suitable breeding or wintering habitat (though breeding habitat has declined), but to production of insufficient young to offset the current adult mortality. The problem could result partly from continuing failures from organochlorine pesticides, together with ground nesting, which makes Merlins unusually vulnerable to foxes *Vulpes vulpes* and other predators, which have increased recently. This view cannot be checked without more information on adult mortality and age of first breeding.

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*Dr I. Newton, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Monks Wood Experimental Station,  
Abbots Ripton, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE17 2LS*  
*E. R. Meek, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Smyril, Stenness, Stromness,  
Mainland, Orkney*  
*B. Little, 37 Stella Hall Drive, Blaydon-on-Tyne, Newcastle, Tyne & Wear*

## Breeding status of the Merlin in Britain



*C. J. Bibby and M. Nattrass*

**T**he Merlin *Falco columbarius* is not so common in Britain as might be expected of a small raptor with an apparently large area of breeding habitat in the uplands. Its numbers are reported to have declined over a long period, perhaps at an increasing rate since about 1950 (Parslow 1967). Organochlorine pesticides were implicated in the 1960s (Newton 1973; Newton *et al.* 1982). Recent studies have, with one exception, reported continuing declines of varying severity (Newton *et al.* 1981, 1986; Williams 1981; Roberts & Green 1983; Bibby *in press*), despite reductions in pesticide use (Newton & Haas 1984).

Merlins can be elusive, and it is particularly time-consuming to confirm with reasonable certainty the absence of pairs. At apparently unoccupied sites, there may be many nearby places where Merlins may be present. Pairs whose nests fail early may not be found at all, especially if the site is

not checked in late April. In well-studied areas, there are many more known places where Merlins have bred, or could do so, than there are actual pairs. Possible sites are not so distinct, recognisable or limited in number as for the crag-nesting raptors. For these reasons, Merlin numbers cannot be assessed or monitored by cataloguing sites and checking large samples, as has been done for Peregrines *F. peregrinus* (Ratcliffe 1984) and Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* (Dennis *et al.* 1984). Some sites are more likely to be occupied in any one year than others (Newton *et al.* 1986; Bibby *in press*); fieldwork tends to be biased, even if unwittingly, towards these favoured sites, especially when a major interest is to find pairs for further study rather than to conduct a well-designed sample census.

The present study aimed to improve knowledge of total numbers and distribution of Merlins in Britain, and to assemble baseline data for future monitoring. Information was required especially for the planning and direction of conservation initiatives. Though imperfect, this is the first attempt at a national survey of this species. We hope that it will help to stimulate further work.

## Methods

Information from the 1983 and 1984 breeding seasons was collected by correspondence, from local workers and from our own fieldwork. In some areas, local ornithologists already interested in Merlins had the necessary background knowledge, skills and access permissions. Such groups were encouraged to make their coverage as complete as possible in the two summers. Elsewhere, we attempted to collate casually collected records. In five areas, where there was no other prospect of getting results, but where reasonable populations of Merlins were suspected to exist, the authors or paid helpers did the fieldwork.

Most recorded data referred to the checking of a given nesting site either known to have been used previously by Merlins or found during the study. A few observers did not provide information on location of nests; because of this, sample sizes are not identical in all analyses. Most records of pairs were followed up to ascertain the outcome of breeding.

## Coverage

A wide coverage was achieved (fig. 1) when judged by the distribution map in the *Atlas* (Sharrock 1976; fig. 2). In Shetland, Orkney and Wales, all known or likely squares shown in the *Atlas* were checked. In northern England and in the rest of Scotland excluding the northern isles, some data were collected for a total of 368 10-km squares; these included about half the squares in which Merlins were reported during the *Atlas* period (1968-72) and about 70% of those where breeding was proved. Coverage was poorest in western Scotland, where *Atlas* records were thinly scattered over a vast area. Some of the more southern *Atlas* records, especially in Derbyshire and Lancashire, were not checked in 1983-84; many were from places perhaps then only marginally suitable and subsequently almost totally abandoned.

The fact that fieldwork was reported in a 10-km square does not mean that all possible sites within it were checked. Nor did the squares covered





Fig. 1. Distribution of 10-km squares in which at least one site was checked during survey of breeding Merlins *Falco columbarius*, 1983-84. Coverage was complete in Shetland, Orkney and Wales

represent a random selection of those which held breeding Merlins in the *Atlas* period. Apart from geographical bias in observer distribution, people are more likely to search for Merlins in the most suitable-looking places.

## Results

Because publication of more detailed information would risk attracting undesirable attention to some of the better places, findings are summarised by region (table 1). The results reflect the general pattern that Merlins do not occupy all their known potential sites in any one year. Even sites at which signs, such as pluckings, droppings or single birds, were found do not all represent breeding pairs.

The figures should not be compared in detail between regions or with other studies. The quality of coverage varied, since more suitable sites are likely to be checked selectively. A thorough study might, therefore, report a lower rate of occupancy than a quick checking of the better sites alone. The present records include some checks made late in the season, when it is possible to find successful pairs though not pairs which have earlier failed and left. It is also likely that some observers would not have reported sites checked with negative results. Particularly in southern Scotland and northern England, many sites checked in the most heavily afforested areas were probably unsuitable and long since abandoned.

### SHETLAND, ORKNEY AND WESTERN ISLES

Coverage in Shetland has been thorough since 1979, so that the majority of recent sites are probably now known (Okill *et al.* 1980). Since 1980, some

MERLIN



Fig. 2. Breeding distribution of Merlins *Falco columbarius* in Britain and Ireland during 1968-72. Large dots, confirmed breeding; medium dots, probable breeding; small dots, possible breeding. Reproduced by permission of the publishers, T. & A. D. Poyser, from *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland*



**Table 1. Known sites of Merlins *Falco columbarius* in Britain and results of checks in 1983 and 1984**

a = no. sites checked, b = no. showing signs of presence of Merlins, including c, definite pairs found

Region	Total sites known	a	1983 b	c	a	1984 b	c
Outer islands	118	88	39	26	93	37	26
Northern Scotland	111	91	55	47	29	22	21
Central Scotland	202	155	99	66	161	115	86
Southern Scotland	111	66	44	34	78	46	35
Northern England	323	255	150	128	245	175	147
Wales	110	87	41	31	97	47	34
TOTALS	975	742	428	332	703	442	349

long-occupied areas have been abandoned. The population has apparently fallen from 25-30 pairs in the 1970s to perhaps about 20, but it is too early to know whether such a trend will continue or whether it is a short-term fluctuation.

In Orkney, the historic record is also quite good, and present coverage is thorough. Numbers have apparently been falling over several decades (Lea & Bourne 1975). Balfour (1968) suggested a total of perhaps 25 pairs in 1955-60, with a slight subsequent decrease. As recently as 1975, the *Orkney Bird Report* suggested that 'the density of this species in Orkney may be unusually high', but poorer reports have been given since 1979-80. The last few years with complete coverage have seen further declines to the present level of five to ten pairs. Moorland habitat in this area has been lost or altered.

The situation in the Western Isles is less well known, but Merlins are clearly not common, with only three pairs found in the present study. In 1973, 12 pairs were reported in the Uists alone (*Scottish Bird Report*). It seems unlikely that a full survey would reveal a total population any greater than about 25 pairs, although seemingly suitable habitat appears abundant.

#### SCOTLAND NORTH OF THE GREAT GLEN

Coverage in this large region was widespread, except in the west, but nowhere intensive. Many of the sites were found by chance during surveys of moorland waders. Reported sites were generally widely spaced, with few records of Merlins despite the large areas covered by the survey teams (NCC and RSPB, unpublished). Many sites were on better-quality lower ground in river valleys, rather than in extensive uniform upland. It is unlikely that there are any concentrations yet to be found, and total numbers in the region are probably below 100 pairs. There is no information from which to assess population trends.

#### CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

Coverage was again widespread, but poorer in the west. Only in Speyside is there sufficient historic information to estimate recent trends (D. N. Weir *in litt.*). After a decline of some 30% from the early 1960s, there are now signs

of possible recovery. Surrounds of many of the abandoned nesting places have been afforested. The present density is about 1.7-2.2 pairs per 100 km<sup>2</sup>. A study in northeast Scotland, especially Deeside (Rebecca & Payne *in press*), has substantially increased knowledge of Merlins in the area and should provide a basis for long-term monitoring; there is much suitable ground to be explored here, and it was suggested that 80-100 pairs could be found in a thorough survey of the northeast. An area of some 4,800 km<sup>2</sup> to the south of Cairngorm-Grampian massif was estimated to contain about 830 km<sup>2</sup> of suitable Merlin ground. About 45% of the area checked held breeding pairs at 40 sites and signs at a further 12. In total, the eastern Highlands must support an important part of the British breeding population.

To the west, the indications are that Merlin numbers are much lower, with a low rate of casual reporting of pairs and rather few sites known. An attempt to locate some areas for studying the effects of afforestation in Kintyre (S. J. Petty *in litt.*) was thwarted by lack of any signs of Merlins, even though potentially suitable areas with recent records were covered. It is probably true of much of western Scotland that Merlins are too scarce to provide adequate reward to anyone looking for them.

#### SOUTHERN UPLANDS

The Lammermuir, Moorfoot and Pentland Hills have some large areas of heather *Calluna/Erica* managed as grouse moor, and quite well covered for Merlins. Coverage was less good in the largely sheepwalk and afforested

89. Female Merlin *Falco columbarius* at nest with eggs, Clwyd, June 1974 (J. Lawton Roberts)







90. Female Merlin *Falco columbarius* at nest with young in hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Dyfed, June 1975 (Graham F. Date)

regions of Ettrick and Tweedsmuir, where few sites are known. The Lowther Hills in Lanarkshire are quite well known, as are the now extensively afforested hills of Galloway and south Ayrshire. The total population of the region is conservatively estimated to be about 50 pairs.

Recent trends in the east are not known, but sufficient information and enthusiasm are now available for future monitoring here. In the west, many sites have been deserted following extensive afforestation. A small population may persist, but be very difficult to find as the habit of forest-edge nesting develops.

#### NORTHERN ENGLAND

There were no known major gaps in coverage of northern England,

**Table 2. Maximum numbers of pairs of Merlins *Falco columbarius* located in Britain in each 10-km square for which data received, 1983-84**

Some sites in central Scotland were not located to 10-km square and are therefore excluded

Region	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	MEAN	
								per 10-km square	per square occupied
Northern Scotland	25	35	8		1			0.80	1.25
Central Scotland	24	34	14	9				1.10	1.56
Southern Scotland	10	13	9	2	1			1.17	1.64
Northern England	12	32	17	9	7	6	3	1.99	2.31
Wales	20	23	5	2				0.78	1.30

although a few pairs would no doubt have been overlooked, especially in low-density areas which were less well searched. Some good concentrations of Merlins were found in areas where the management of grouse moors continues. Much lower numbers were found on grass-dominated sheep-walks.

The long-running study in Northumbria has revealed declines in numbers and in breeding success in the period 1974-83 (Newton *et al.* 1986). The decline in the Peak District from several tens of pairs to nearly zero has also been well documented (Newton *et al.* 1981). No other large areas are well documented, but it was interesting to find five pairs on the moor where Rowan (1921-22), in his pioneering studies of Merlins, was never able to locate more than four pairs in any year. It is hoped that work will continue on one or two of the major grouse moors where Merlins are still sufficiently numerous for it to be unlikely that large declines have occurred in the recent past.

#### WALES

Coverage throughout Wales has been extensive and fairly thorough, but there are many potential sites in places less characteristic of Merlins but known to have been occupied occasionally. Analysis in relation to major vegetation communities has shown a strong trend of decreasing annual occupancy of sites related primarily to the trend from heather to grass domination (Bibby *in press*). This allows a prediction of the total population from coverage of a sub-sample of sites biased towards the better possible ones.

**Table 3. Distribution of numbers of pairs of Merlins *Falco columbarius* in Britain per 10-km square, according to nest site, 1983-84**

Ground nesting is more frequent with higher densities: *z* test for linear trends in proportions:  
 $z = 5.54, P < 0.001$

Nest site	NUMBER OF PAIRS IN SQUARE						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Tree nests	51	33	25	4	2		
Ground nests	90	84	64	37	42	10	15
% ground nests	65	72	72	90	95	100	100

The Welsh population is estimated at 40-45 pairs, of which about 75% were found in 1983 and 1984. Analysis of the same data set by the same methods predicted a moorland population of about 70 pairs in the mid 1970s, and there were additionally a few lowland and coastal sites still occupied then. In other words, a substantial decline has occurred in the last ten years, although probably not so great as suggested by comparison with Williams (1981), who estimated 'a conservative figure of at least 150 breeding pairs' for the period 1968-78. This larger figure is the result primarily of different assumptions by which substantially the same information was analysed: most importantly, Williams assumed that all sites reported were occupied by pairs each year, irrespective of the proximity of other occupied sites or of whether Merlins had ever been found breeding as



against merely seen in summer. Roberts & Green (1983) reported a sharp decline on one moor which previously held a particularly high density of Merlins.

### *Densities*

There were clear variations in density of Merlins, some places having adjacent pairs 2-4 km apart and others where scattered pairs had no near neighbours. Since we had no measures of area of suitable habitat, table 2 presents numbers of pairs by 10-km squares for all squares where at least one site was checked (records for which inadequate locations were given are not included). If records were received for both years, the numbers of pairs given for each square are the higher of the two, but they are still minima as all the ground may not have been searched.

Densities may be five to ten pairs per 100 km<sup>2</sup> (i.e. per 10-km square) in suitable habitat, which is, however, rarely extensive. Only 40 squares were found to contain more than two pairs of Merlins in a single year. Most of these were in northern England. More than half the squares in which some fieldwork was carried out produced one or no pairs of Merlins, which must be considered typical of densities by area of total land rather than by suitable habitat. Grid boundaries fell arbitrarily over actual blocks of moorland, and the pattern of concentrations was still clearer on a map as 16 of the 18 best squares fell in three contiguous groups.

As insufficient records included classification of surrounding habitats, nest site has been used as a general indicator. In afforested and grass-dominated areas, Merlins generally nest in trees. On heather moors, they nest mainly on the ground. Table 3 shows that ground nesting was proportionately more frequent in the squares with more Merlins. This is because, in general, the best places for Merlins are heather-dominated, while tree nesting is more frequent in less-favoured habitats.

### *Breeding success*

Data on breeding success from this study were biased by variation of effort. Pairs which fail early or do not lay are more likely to be detected in a thorough study. Casually studied areas can appear to be disproportionately more successful. While urging caution over the interpretation of these results, we indicate two points which deserve further attention by publication of findings from more thorough studies as these become available.

Of the regions summarised in table 4, only in Wales are numbers known to be declining throughout. That Wales shows the lowest breeding success may be a reflection of the intensity of study. In Northumbria (Newton *et al.* 1986), success rates of nests have fallen in the last ten years such that some 50% of Merlins now fail to rear young: a proportion similar to that in Wales in the same period. In Orkney, too, the population has been declining, and in the present study 17 pairs reared only 21 young. For the other two areas where populations are known to be declining (Galloway and the Peak District), there are insufficient data to assess breeding success. From three areas, it seems that nesting success of about 50%, with an average of less than two young being reared per pair, is associated with declining numbers.

Table 4. Breeding statistics of Merlins *Falco columbarius* in Britain, 1983-84

Note that the figures are biased by incomplete study

Region	Pairs	Pairs success- ful	Young	Young per pair	Young per success	% pairs successful
Outer Islands	51	37	108	2.12	2.92	73
Northern Scotland	37	25	85	2.30	3.40	68
Central Scotland	105	72	252	2.40	3.50	69
Southern Scotland	52	33	115	2.21	3.48	63
Northern England	190	126	454	2.39	3.60	66
Wales	63	32	107	1.70	3.34	51

For the larger regions shown in table 4, the data are not currently sufficient to assess trends in numbers or, because of the bias due to effort, to be confident that nesting success is as good as indicated.

Newton *et al.* (1978) showed that, in Northumbria, tree nests are more successful than ground nests. In Wales, a non-significant trend was found in the other direction (Bibby in press). Since heather moors are preferred habitats and ground nesting is more prevalent on them, it would be informative to know whether or not the Northumbrian finding is widely true. In the present survey, there was no difference in success between ground nests and tree nests (table 5). Successful brood sizes tended to be larger for ground than for tree nesters, so that, in total, ground nests reared more young per attempt, although not significantly so.

Table 5. Success of nests of Merlins *Falco columbarius* in Britain in relation to site, 1983-84

Difference in success rates according to nest site:  $\chi^2_1 = 1.22$ ; n.s.

Difference in production of young per pair according to nest site:  $t_{422} = 1.54$ ; n.s.

Site	No. nests	YOUNG PER NEST						Total young	%	Young per pair	Mean brood size
		0	1	2	3	4	5				
Ground	324	110	5	20	73	74	42	770	66	2.38	3.60
Tree	100	40	3	7	19	24	7	205	60	2.05	3.42

Discussion

How many Merlins in Britain?

Much of the difference between 1983 and 1984 in counts in one region was due to differences of effort. Taking the higher count for each region gives a total of some 375 pairs actually discovered. In four of the six regions, sufficient coverage was achieved for it to be possible to estimate what the total might have been after making an informed guess as to the proportion of suitable ground not checked. We suggest that there may be approximately 50 pairs in Orkney, Shetland and the Outer Hebrides combined; 50 in southern Scotland; 180 in northern England; and 40 in Wales. In mainland Scotland north of the central lowlands, 133 pairs were located; we can no more than guess that there may be another 100-200 pairs to be found in this huge area. The remaining population, in southwest England, is very small (less than five pairs).





91. Female Merlin *Falco columbarius* with juvenile House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, at perch near nest, Clwyd, June 1975 (Dennis Green)

The round-number range of 550-650 pairs is an estimate of how many pairs would be found if coverage was thorough in the sense normally understood by raptor workers looking for such a difficult bird. It is not possible to estimate how thorough this is, but Merlins can breed in such a variety of places and be so elusive that any survey of a large area is unlikely to reveal all pairs. For applied purposes, however, the relative counts derived from work of normal thoroughness are sufficient for assessing the importance of particular areas. Population trends can be measured by applying a constant effort from year to year without expecting 100% efficiency.

### *Distribution*

The *Atlas* map (Sharrock 1976, fig. 2) indicates the total breeding range of the Merlin. The general impression it gives probably remains correct, although numbers and distribution have since contracted in the southwest, Wales, the south Pennines, and probably southwest Scotland. Numbers are less well indicated. Many of the *Atlas* records were of possible or probable breeding only. Few Merlins breed at one year of age, and single individuals can be seen in non-breeding areas and may account for a proportion of the *Atlas* records. Favoured sites may be used repeatedly over many years, but Merlins also breed sporadically elsewhere and the pattern of such records over five years would tend to enlarge the distribution and mask concentrations.

In detail, our information reveals more about Merlin distribution than the *Atlas* survey. Since well-known Merlin areas tend to suffer from human disturbance, however, we are hesitant to publish detailed information. Some areas within the general distribution shown in the *Atlas* have considerably higher densities of Merlins than others. High densities are strongly associated with extensive heather moorland, primarily where grouse-shooting and its attendant management continues as a major land use. In Scotland, England and Wales, such areas tend to have an easterly distribution, away from the areas of highest rainfall and most impoverished soils. The preference shown by Merlins for heather moorland is well known, but its causes are not fully understood. It is not known whether the association with grouse moors is coincidentally due to preference for better soils with heather, or whether grouse-keeping has benefits to Merlins as a result of vegetation or predator management.

Where grouse-shooting is not important, open moorland is often heavily grazed, and grass-dominated, or has been afforested. Merlins occur sporadically in such places, but pairs are rarely as close together as may be found on heather moorland, where groups of pairs are often spaced at 2-4 km from each other.

### *Population trends*

A general decline in Merlins over the first half of the present century is widely acknowledged. In the period 1970-80, Peregrines and Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus* have made impressive recoveries in numbers and range, especially away from the arable areas of southeast England where Merlins do not breed (Ratcliffe 1984; Newton & Haas 1984). From the few studies of Merlins of sufficient thoroughness, the evidence points to a continued decline and certainly no strong recovery anywhere during this most recent period.

In the period 1974-83, in Northumberland, breeding success has declined in association with a population decline (Newton *et al.* 1986). On a single moor in Wales, poor breeding success was also evident during a period of sharp population decline (Roberts & Green 1983). Evidence presented in the present paper shows wide variation in breeding success, with a suggestion that poor breeding may be more frequent in areas with declining numbers than in places with relatively strong and possibly stable



numbers. It should be noted that, in order to measure breeding success, data need to be collected carefully, since pairs which fail early or do not lay at all are harder to detect than those which rear young. More thorough study is, therefore, likely to produce lower estimates of numbers of young reared per pair.

### *Pesticides*

Organochlorine levels in British Merlin eggs and effects on breeding success up to 1980 were reviewed by Newton *et al.* (1982), and breeding failures by Newton (1973). Shell-thinning associated with DDE residues was demonstrated. DDE levels were not associated with the partial success of individual clutches, and were below those shown to cause total clutch failure in Canada (Fyfe *et al.* 1976). Similar or higher DDE levels were reported in Newfoundland (Temple 1972) and Sweden (Olsson 1980) in populations whose breeding success is greater than that currently found in Britain.

For several reasons, the possibility of Merlins continuing to be adversely affected by pesticide residues cannot be totally dismissed. Study of eggs deals only with that part of the population which lays, while breeding success could be depressed by pairs failing altogether to lay or failing before their nests were found. Secondly, quite marked regional variations were noted and sampling might have under-represented some of the least successful areas, such as the Peak District, where it is difficult to collect any eggs. Egg breakage is currently a frequent cause of nest failure in Orkney and Shetland, though evidently not elsewhere.

Newton *et al.* (1982) drew attention to the fact that British Merlins, perhaps through being predominantly ground nesters, seemed to have a lower breeding success than those in Canada or Scandinavia. Population levels might as a result be more sensitive to factors causing even a small reduction in breeding success or adult survival. It would, therefore, be desirable to continue to study organochlorine residues in eggs and in adults found dead.

### *Habitat loss*

The spread of conifers and sheep-grazed grass-moorland and the decrease of heather undoubtedly constitute a long-term loss of the best Merlin breeding habitats. It is not, however, clear to what extent habitat loss has been responsible for recent declines in Merlin numbers or failures of populations to recover from pesticide-induced declines from the 1950s and 1960s. Habitat loss has undoubtedly contributed to loss of individual sites in some areas, such as in southwest Scotland (forestry) or in Orkney, Wales and southwest England (mainly replacement of heather by grasses). In the Peak District, however, the population declined sharply in the 1950s, but then continued to decline in spite of previously used sites still apparently being suitably vegetated (Newton *et al.* 1981).

In Wales, heath-dominated sites are occupied in preference to those extensively surrounded by grass-moorland, and the preferred sites produce more young per pair (Bibby *in press*). Such a result was not found in



92. Female Merlin *Falco columbarius* with part of Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*, retrieved from nearby cache amongst heather *Calluna vulgaris*, at perch near nest, Cilwyd, June 1975 (Dennis Green)

Northumbria (Newton *et al.* 1986); there (Newton *et al.* 1978), but not in Wales, tree nesters were more successful, perhaps because they were less accessible to predators. Ground nesting is most frequent on the preferred heather-dominated sites. If the Welsh findings have any general truth, then loss of habitat, through influencing breeding success, could have an effect on population numbers before the stage at which habitats are so changed as never to be occupied by pairs of Merlins.

Resolution of this uncertainty requires more information on site occupancy and breeding success in relation to habitats. In particular, it would be useful to know more about the causes of breeding failure. It might be that



predators such as crows (*Corvidae*) or foxes *Vulpes vulpes* are more abundant in grass-dominated or conifer-dominated landscapes than on heather moorland, especially if the heather moors are kept for grouse.

### *Future work*

Unlike most other birds of prey in Britain, the present trends of the Merlin are unsatisfactory, for reasons inadequately understood. It may well be, as suggested by Newton *et al.* (1982), that breeding success is generally poor in Britain, so that any further reduction caused by pesticides, habitat changes or other factors unknown could be enough to produce further declines. The habitats used by British Merlins are peculiar in being so heavily altered by Man. Elsewhere, tree nesting on forest margins is widely typical, rather than ground nesting in the open.

Both in its own right and with regard to current debate about the state funding which drives land-use changes in the uplands, the Merlin is of interest to nature conservation. More knowledge is clearly required, with a need for monitoring in a spread of regions, studying breeding success and diets, and investigating the effects of pesticides and habitat changes. Determined groups of amateurs, who have already contributed much of what we know about Merlins, have a very valuable role to play.

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### **Summary**

This first, albeit incomplete, attempt in 1983 and 1984 to count the number of breeding Merlins *Falco columbarius* in Britain suggested a total population of 550-650 pairs; some 375 pairs were actually located. Densities exceeded two pairs per 10-km square in only 40 squares, and were higher where Merlins nested on the ground than where they used trees. In all the five areas studied with sufficient intensity in the last ten years, numbers have decreased. Poor breeding success, with about half the nests failing, is associated with declining numbers in all three areas where sufficient information is available (Orkney, Northumberland and Wales).

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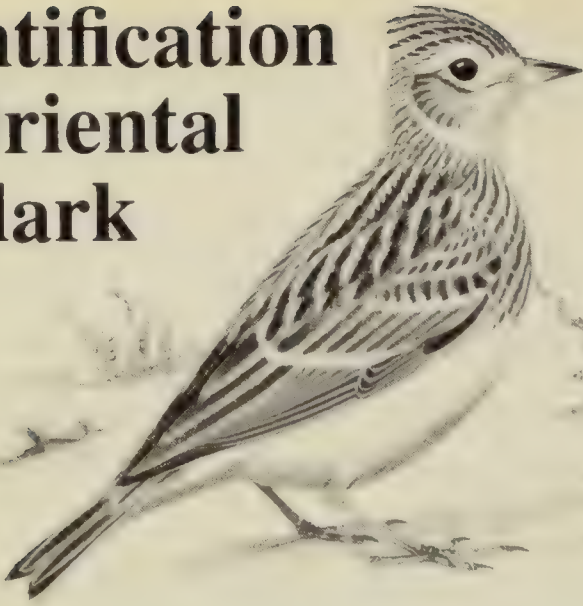
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# Identification of Oriental Skylark



*Hadoram Shirihi*

**T**he Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula* (also sometimes known as Small Skylark, Lesser Skylark or Eastern Skylark) is found across a large area of southern Asia. Eleven races were recognised by Vaurie (1959), most of which are resident in tropical Asia, but *A. g. inconspicua*, which breeds west to central Asia and Iran, is migratory, though its winter quarters are not known. The species has not yet been reliably recorded in Europe, although there are several recent records for Israel (see final section, and Shirihi in prep.) and it is possible that the Oriental Skylark will eventually be found in western Europe, and perhaps even Britain and Ireland.

The main confusion species is Skylark *A. arvensis*, especially the smaller races. Given good views, however, the careful observer should not find separating them a serious problem. This paper summarises the main identification features of Oriental Skylark and its distinction from Skylark and other larks.

## Identification in the field

In the field, Oriental Skylark resembles Skylark in coloration, but Woodlark *Lullula arborea* in shape and flight. Its pointed bill is relatively long and thick, and it has a shortish tail and relatively long legs. From a distance, it might even be confused with Short-toed *Calandrella brachydactyla* or Lesser Short-toed Lark *C. rufescens*. The following are important points to observe when identifying the Oriental Skylark in the field.

**SILHOUETTE AND SIZE** Size as Woodlark (about 16 cm in length), significantly smaller than nominate Skylark (18.5 cm). Bill seems small, but, compared with Skylark's and Woodlark's, is longer and thicker. From side, forehead looks rather flat and in line with bill. When raised, short crest gives head pointed shape. Tail looks short compared with Skylark's, and extends less beyond wing-tip, but is longer and projects more than does Wood-

lark's. Wings rather short, primaries projecting little, if at all, beyond tertials, unlike Skylark's. Generally, silhouette is that of small and squat lark, recalling Woodlark.

**HEAD** Dark streaks visible on forehead and crown. Ear-coverts obviously rusty toned. Nape grey to rusty-brown, with dark streaking. Chin and throat whitish, and dark moustachial and malar stripes are much less prominent than on Skylark; crest also much

less prominent. Lores and supercilium strikingly whitish, latter being longer and more noticeable than Skylark's, but do not meet at back of head, unlike Woodlark's (see fig. 1).

**UPPERPARTS** Brown to dark-brown feathers of mantle and scapulars have noticeably sandy fringes. Wing-coverts dark brown, also with sandy or rusty edges. Pale grey lesser coverts contrast with rusty-brown median and greater coverts. Unlike both Skylark and Woodlark, rusty fringes of primaries and secondaries give impression of very rusty-coloured wing. Rump pale rusty, with dark feather-centres.

**TAIL** Short and slightly forked. Outer feathers rather sandy-coloured, not white as on Skylark. (Woodlark has very short-looking tail, less forked and with white outer feathers and white tips to inner ones, giving pattern quite different from that of Oriental Skylark.)

**UNDERPARTS** Breast sandy-yellow, with delicate, narrow dark-brown to medium-brown streaking extending to upper belly. Belly sandy-white, lacking streaking on flanks.

**BARE PARTS** Bill brownish-grey, with pale greyish-yellow base to lower mandible. Legs fleshy-pink to yellow, and quite long.

### *Appearance in flight*

In flight, Oriental Skylark's wings seem short and rounded and its tail also looks rather short. The pale trailing edge to the wing is sandy or rusty in colour, and is less noticeable than and clearly different from the contrasting white trailing edge of Skylark. The flight action of Oriental is very slow, and it tends to hover and flutter its wings when low over a field (about 30 cm from the ground). The flight silhouette is rather like that of Woodlark. At a higher altitude, its flight is faster and recalls that of Short-toed Lark or Skylark.

### *Voice*

The Oriental Skylark's voice is totally different in character from that of Skylark and Woodlark. I transcribed its call as 'baz, baz' or 'baz-terr': the notes being staccato, reminiscent of the calls of Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*. Dr J. T. R. Sharrock (*in litt.*) described the call as 'a very distinctive, soft buzz'. The species usually gives one to three calls at intervals of one to two seconds.

### *Summary of identification in the field*

Oriental Skylark is close in colour and plumage pattern to both Skylark and Woodlark. Important features that distinguish it in the field from Skylark are its small and squat appearance and its clearly shorter tail, wings and primary projection; when standing, it shows an obviously rusty tone on the ear-coverts and wings. In flight, its short tail and short, rounded wings are apparent, while it has a sandy, not white, trailing edge to the wings, as well as sandy tail-sides. Its calls are decisively different from those of any other lark. It differs from Lesser Short-toed Lark and Short-toed Lark in its thicker and more prominent streaking on the breast and in its noticeably

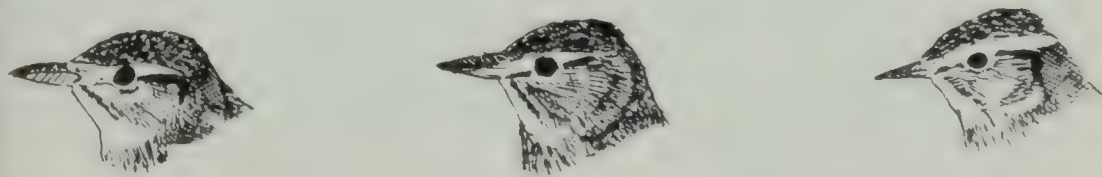


Fig. 1. Head patterns of Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, Skylark *A. arvensis* and Woodlark *Lullula arborea* (Hadoram Shirihai)





**93 & 94.** Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, Israel, November 1985 (*Paul Doherty*)







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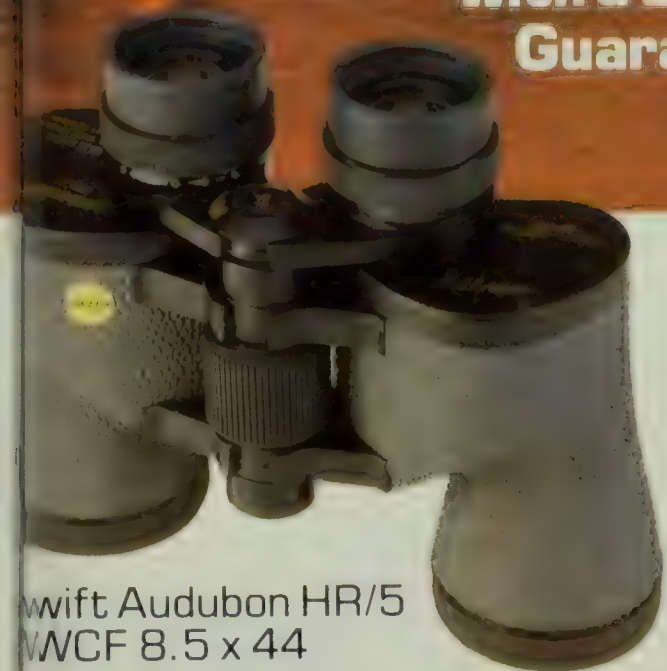
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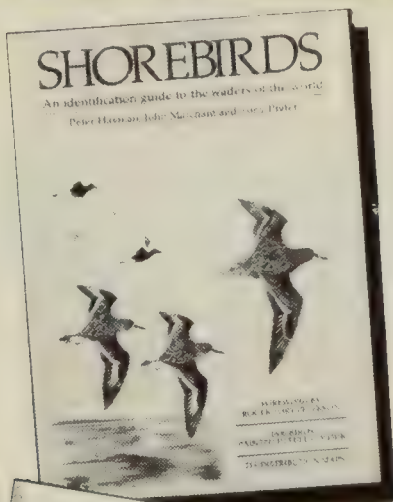
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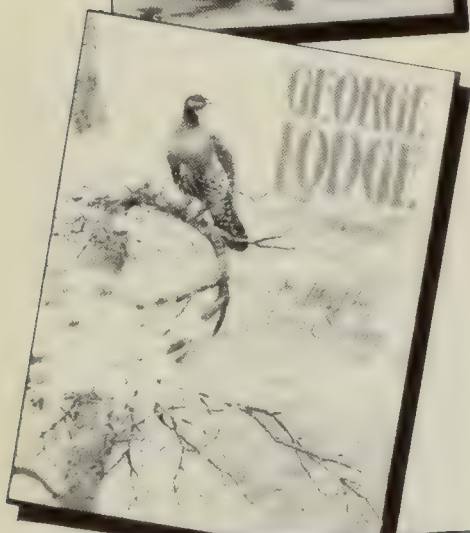
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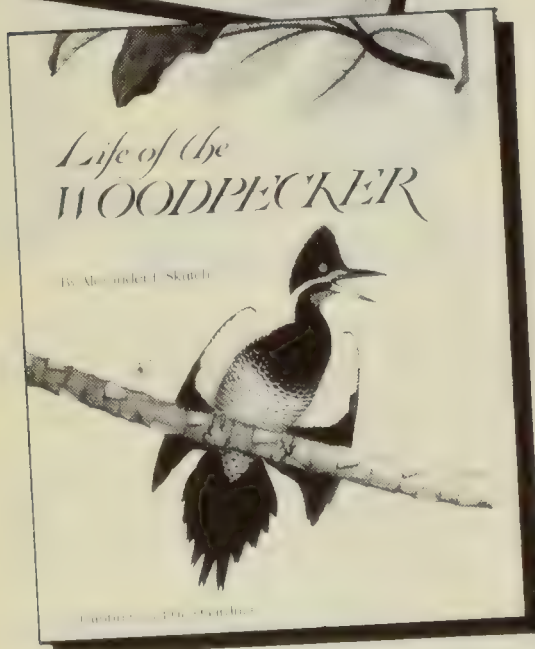


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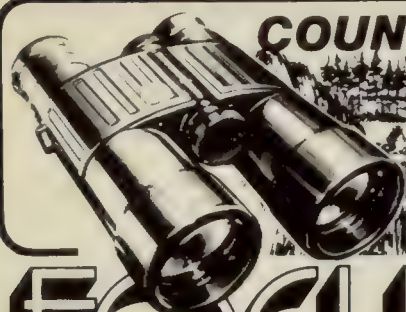
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95. Skylark *Alauda arvensis* with wing expanded, Israel, January 1985 (D. Pierce, K. Foundation)

96. Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula* with wing expanded, Israel, March 1985 (Hadoram Shirihi)







97. Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, Israel, November 1984 (*Hadoram Shirihai*)

longer and narrower bill; it is also a little larger. Woodlark has a longer white supercilium, a shorter tail with white sides and white-tipped inner feathers, and lacks the rusty-fringed primaries and secondaries of Oriental Skylark.

The coloration and build of Oriental Skylark are somewhat similar to those of various other larks, particularly Skylark; they do not attract attention. The most likely way of locating an Oriental Skylark among a flock of Skylarks is by its call.

### Identification in the hand

In the hand, distinguishing Oriental Skylark from Skylark is not difficult. The main differences are in length of tail and wing, and in wing formula. The measurements of Oriental are markedly smaller than those of nominate Skylark, with hardly any overlap. The rusty outer fringes of the primaries and secondaries are typical of Oriental Skylark; the colour of the outer pair of tail feathers is also significant: sandy on Oriental, white on Skylark. Oriental also averages 15 g less in weight than nominate Skylark.

The following description is taken from personal notes made on ten individuals examined in the hand in Eilat, Israel, during autumn/winter 1984/85.

**HEAD** Whitish supercilium starting at base of bill, narrow at first, broad and prominent behind eye, then tapering to a point 10 mm behind eye. Lores, chin and eye-ring whitish or pale brown. Ear-coverts pale brown to rusty, slightly streaked with darker brown and encircled by blackish stripe starting under eye. Feathers of crown blackish/dark brown (80% of their centre) with buff fringes, producing streaked effect; when raised, these feathers create small crest. Throat buffish-white without clearly defined moustachial or malar stripes. Nape greyer than crown.

**UPPERPARTS** Dominant colour of mantle and scapulars blackish to dark brown, with feather edges pale grey to sandy. Rump and

uppertail-coverts more rusty, with only centres of feathers dark brown.

**UNDERPARTS** Light sandy-coloured, with breast (especially sides) narrowly and clearly streaked dark brown. Much individual variation in this pattern: some individuals have narrow and delicate streaks, others have relatively broad ones. Belly paler. Vent and undertail-coverts pale sandy-coloured.

**WINGS** *Upperwing* Greater coverts dark brown, broadly fringed and tipped sandy-brown (inner greater coverts edged paler, outer ones more rusty). Median coverts similar, but fringes a shade rustier. Lesser coverts dark brown, with fringes greyer than median and greater coverts. Greater primary



98. Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, Israel, January 1985 (D. Pierce, K. Foundation)

coverts dark brown, with outer webs rusty-coloured and tips sandy. Feathers of alula dark brown, outer webs with rusty fringe, and tips sandy. Primaries and secondaries dark brown, all except second primary with rusty outer webs; second primary with pale sandy outer web. Tertiaries dark brown, with outer edges rusty to pale sandy. Seventh to tenth primaries and secondaries have notched tips. Fourth to tenth primaries (mainly sixth to tenth) have rather contrasting sandy tips 1-2 mm wide forming trailing edge, less noticeable on secondaries.

*Underwing* Remiges grey. Coverts whitish

to sandy. Axillaries rusty to dark brown.

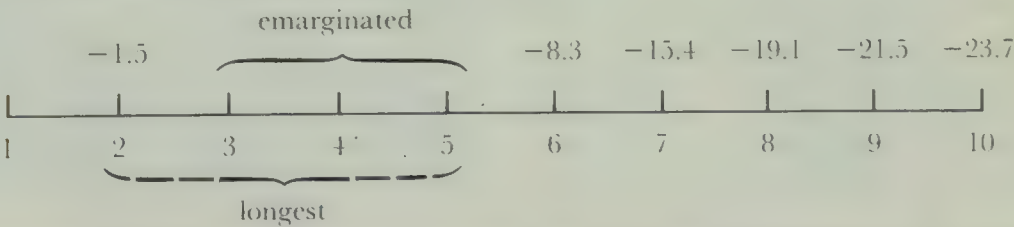
**TAIL** Rectrices dark brown. Outer tail feather mainly sandy; second feather with outer web sandy-coloured; third with only a sandy tip; fourth and fifth with narrow sandy edges to outer and inner webs. Fringes of central pair of feathers wider, with sandy and rusty tones.

**BARE PARTS** Bill small, but, compared with Skylark, looks long, thick and pointed; upper mandible brown to dark grey; lower mandible horn-grey, with dark tip. Iris brown. Tarsus and toes pale flesh-coloured; soles paler; claws pale horn.

Measurements and wing formula

Table 1 gives the average measurements of ten Oriental Skylarks which I caught at Eilat in autumn-winter 1984/85. Although some overlap occurs between measurements of Oriental Skylark and Skylark (Baker 1926; Dementiev & Gladkov 1970; Ali & Ripley 1972), this is in most cases slight, and a combination of measurements would be conclusive in identification.

The wing formula of Oriental Skylark, calculated as the average of the ten individuals examined, is shown below:



First primary 9.5-12.0 mm shorter than primary coverts. Inner secondaries - 14.3; tertiaries - 3.2

The tip of the wing is usually formed by the third and fourth primaries, although sometimes only by the fourth. It can also sometimes be formed jointly by the second to fifth.

A major distinction between Oriental Skylark and Skylark is the





99. Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula* and Skylark *A. arvensis*, Israel, November 1985 (Paul Doherty)

**Table 1. Measurements (in mm) of Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula* based on ten individuals trapped at Eilat, Israel, in autumn-winter 1984/85**

	Range	Mean
Wing	89.0-98.5	93.5
Wing spread	273-304	290.8
Tail	54.5-61.0	56.7
Tail difference (outer feather to inner)	2.0-6.5	3.7
Tail-tip to coverts (under)	21.0-26.0	24.8
Tail-tip to coverts (upper)	16.0-23.0	19.7
Bill (to skull)	15.0-16.5	15.8
Bill (to feathering)	9.8-11.5	10.4
Bill depth (at nostrils)	4.2-5.0	4.6
Bill width (at nostrils)	4.2-5.2	4.5
Tarsus	23.0-25.0	24.2
Tarsus thickness (at middle)	1.1-1.3 × 1.9-2.0	1.17 × 1.98
Footspan (less claws)	26.0-29.0	26.8
Footspan (with claws)	41.0-52.0	43.5
Hind claw	11.0-21.0	14.0
Middle claw	5.5-7.0	5.9
Inner claw	3.0-5.0	4.2
Outer claw	3.2-5.5	4.1
Weight (g)	19.5-26.0	22.6

difference between the wing-tip and the tip of the fifth primary. This can be summarised as follows:

Oriental Skylark:  $p5 < \text{tip of wing} = 5 \text{ mm or less}$  (range 0-5.0 mm, mean 1.28 mm)

Skylark:  $p5 < \text{tip of wing} = 5 \text{ mm or more}$  (range 5.0-9.5 mm, mean 7 mm)

In addition, there is a marked difference in wing-tip to inner secondaries, wing-tip to tertials, and in the first primary to primary coverts. On Oriental, these are as follows:

inner secondaries  $< \text{tip of wing} = 13.0-17.0 \text{ mm}$  (mean 14.3 mm)

tertials  $< \text{tip of wing} = 1.0-8.0 \text{ mm}$  (mean 3.2 mm)

first primary  $< \text{longest primary covert} = 9.5-12.0 \text{ mm}$  (mean 10.7 mm)

On Skylark, these are significantly greater:

inner secondaries < tip of wing = average 25.0 mm  
 tertials < tip of wing = average 16.0 mm  
 first primary < longest primary covert = 13.0-18.0 mm.

No difference was found between the two species in the length of primary emarginations or notches.

### Sexing

Very little appears to be known about the sexing of Oriental Skylark. Ali & Ripley (1972) and Dementiev & Gladkov (1970) have shown that males and females differ in length of wing and tail, with some overlap in wing measurement, and also differ slightly in lengths of bill and tarsus, but with considerable overlap between the sexes.

### Age and moult

I cannot find any detailed information on ageing and moult of Oriental Skylark. I assume that both are similar to those of Skylark, as detailed by Svensson (1984), Ginn & Melville (1983), and Dementiev & Gladkov (1970). These authors note that both adult and juvenile Skylarks have a complete moult during July to mid October, after which they are impossible to age. On individuals which have not finished the complete moult, the unmoulted, old outer primaries of adult Skylarks are heavily worn, while those of juveniles are slightly worn and have clear buffish-white edges (Svensson 1984). Zarudnyi (1916) pointed out that adult Oriental Skylark moults in July-August, while the juvenile begins its moult as soon as it becomes independent of its parents.



100. Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, Israel, March 1985 (Hadoram Shirihi)

101. Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, Israel, January 1985 (D. Pierce, K. Foundation)

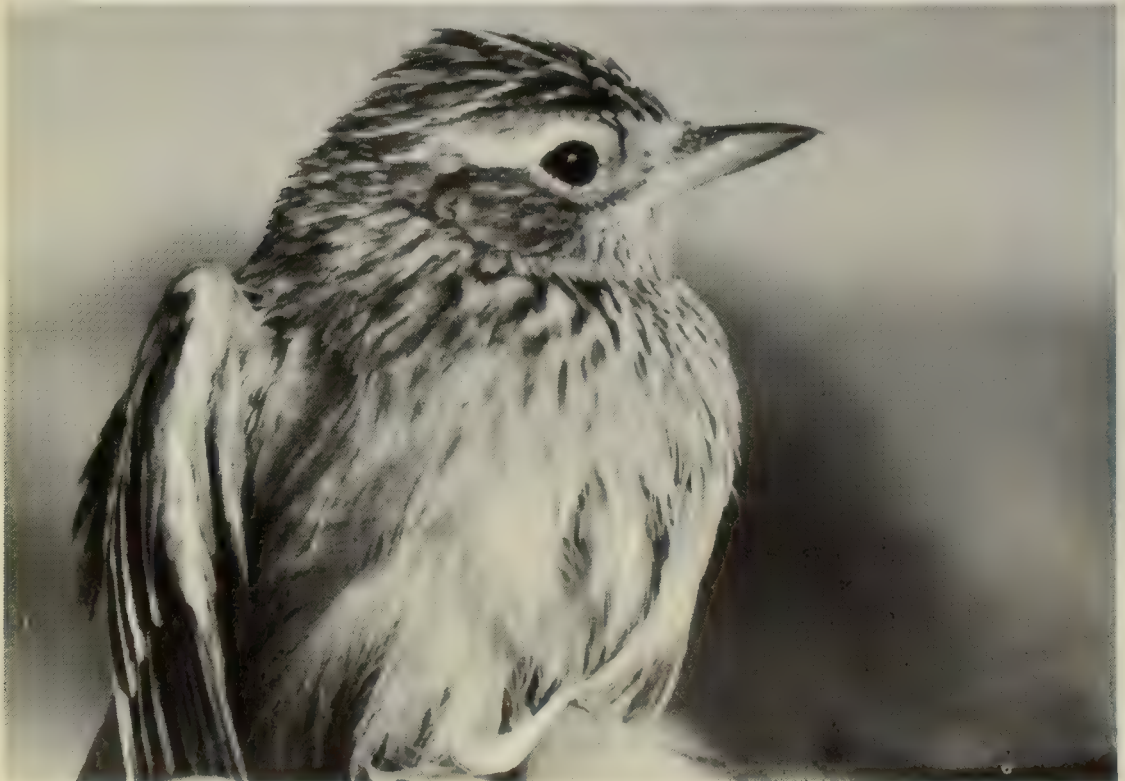
All Oriental Skylarks that I caught in Israel in autumn 1984 had fresh remiges with hardly any wear. The edges of their primaries were pale. Assuming that the species' moult and ageing are the same as those of Skylark, these details indicate that they had all completed their moult, and were thus not ageable. It is interesting to note that the plumage of all





**102.** Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, Israel, November 1984 (*Hadoram Shirihaï*)

**103.** Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, Israel, October 1984 (*M. Meyer*)





104. Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, Israel, November 1984 (Hadoram Shirihi)

105. Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, Israel, January 1985 (D. Pierce, K. Foundation)



106. Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, Israel, October 1984 (O. ben Shafrut)

Oriental Skylarks that I have seen in Israel between January and April appeared worn and faded, although wear was less apparent on the remiges; they also had longer and more protruding crests than did those seen in October-November.





107. Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, Israel, March 1985 (*Hadoram Shirihi*)

### The Oriental Skylark in Israel

Meinertzhagen (1930) recorded an Oriental Skylark of the race *A. g. inconspicua* collected in Egypt in 1914, but recent examination of the skin showed it to be a Skylark (Stanley Cramp *in litt.*). The first records for the West Palearctic came, therefore, when I discovered two individuals in fields near Eilat, Israel, on 28th September 1984. At least one of these was present up to the end of October, when further examples were found. Thereafter, others came to light. During 28th September 1984 to 5th April 1985, a total of 16 Oriental Skylarks was seen, ten of which I trapped and ringed; nine were noted during September-November and a further seven in the period December-January. Up to eight wintered in the area.

The first group (migrants?) fed in a patch of desert and damp ploughed fields, as well as in green fields that were well irrigated. They appeared to prefer the drier areas, with low, sparse growth. The wintering group preferred a field of melons, where they both fed and roosted.

## Acknowledgments

I should like to thank all those who have helped me in the field, in the museum, and in the writing of this paper. Particular thanks are due to Merav Galaret, who helped almost daily with two ringing seasons, and in many other ways. Halcyon Wood worked as a volunteer ringer in 1984. Zila Shariv and Professor Mendelson of Tel Aviv University enabled me to work at the museum. Special thanks go to Nina Sebba, who translated and edited my original writing; Walter Roggeman, Niels Kjellen and Steve Morgan also helped in editing and correcting the translation. I also thank the many birders from England, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Israel who visited the Eilat ringing station and helped with their observations. Last, but not least, I thank the Israel Nature Reserves Authority, who sponsor my fieldwork and writing at Eilat and have given me such help and the time and means to work there; and my colleagues at Eilat NRA—Yuval Peled, Eilon Ziv, Oded ben Shafrut, Reuben Hafner and Yechian Schlesinger—who have helped in many ways.

## Summary

The Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula* is not difficult to separate from Skylark *A. arvensis*. In the field, it looks smaller and squatter, with noticeably shorter tail, wings and primary projection, an obvious rusty tone on ear-coverts and wings, and sandy outer tail feathers. Its bill is comparatively long and thicker than Skylark's and Woodlark's *Lullula arborea*. In flight, it has a sandy, not white, trailing edge to the wings, which seem short and rounded, and its tail looks rather short. Woodlark has a different head pattern and a shorter tail. Oriental differs from Short-toed *Calandrella brachydactyla* and Lesser Short-toed Larks *C. rufescens* in its longer and narrower bill and its more prominent breast streaking. Its buzzing call is different from that of any other lark. It is often more approachable in the field than, for example, Skylark. The main distinguishing features in the hand are the length of tail and of wings, and the wing formula, Oriental being markedly smaller than the nominate race of Skylark; a major distinction is the shortfall between fifth primary and wing-tip (5 mm or less on Oriental, 5 mm or more on Skylark). Notes are provided on sexing, moult and ageing of Oriental Skylark and on its occurrence in Israel.

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*Hadoram Shirihai, Birdwatching Center, Nature Reserves Authority,  
POB 774 Eilat, Israel*

POSTSCRIPT In autumn and early winter 1985, up to ten Oriental Skylarks reappeared at Eilat from 1st October; one was already ringed and is assumed to have been one of those from autumn-winter 1984/85.



# Coats and jackets for birdwatchers



J. T. R. Sharrock

We have, on three previous occasions, carried out surveys of readers' ownership and usage of binoculars and telescopes (*Brit. Birds* 71: 429-439; 76: 155-161; 78: 167-175). It would, we believe, be generally acknowledged that the readers of *British Birds* are the most active and discriminating of all birdwatchers, spending more time in the field in a greater variety of habitats and conditions than any other group. For this reason, we regard a survey of our readers' likes and dislikes to be useful not only to any birdwatcher contemplating a relevant purchase, but also to the manufacturers of the products surveyed, for our readers' views will be based on the most valid of all possible testing: prolonged use in field conditions. On this occasion, we have turned our attention to clothing rather than optical equipment. Which—in the opinion of our readers—are the best anoraks, cagoules, coats, jackets, windcheaters, and so on, for birdwatching? We received 1,029 replies as a result of the detachable questionnaire in the August 1985 issue of *British Birds*. We acknowledge that this sample is not unbiased: readers wishing to praise or to criticise a garment that they own will perhaps have had a greater incentive to reply than those merely content with their coat or jacket, or, especially, those who have still not found the perfect birdwatching gear, but who will nevertheless be eagerly awaiting the results of this survey. (Some respondents answered most but not all questions in the questionnaire, so the numbers of each make of garment do not always correspond in every table.)

## The most popular coats and jackets

One make stands out as the most popular overgarment for birdwatchers at all seasons. *Barbour* jackets head the lists for use in winter (table 1), in summer (table 2) and all-year-around (table 3). The *Barbour Solway* is the most popular for winter wear and all-year-around wear, with the *Barbour Durham* (reviewed *Brit. Birds* 78: 646) coming into its own in summer.

Table 1. Most popular coats or jackets for winter wear

Percentage ownership for winter use		
Position	Make	%
1	BARBOUR	45.5
2	BERGHAUS	7.9
3	MASCOT	5.2
4	PETER STORM	4.7
5	FJÄLLRÄVEN	4.1
6	BELSTAFF	3.8
7	SPRAYWAY	2.6
	All others	26.2

Table 2. Most popular coats or jackets for summer wear

Percentage ownership for summer use		
Position	Make	%
1=	BARBOUR	24.7
1=	PETER STORM	24.7
3	FJÄLLRÄVEN	10.6
4	GREENSPOT	8.2
5=	BERGHAUS	3.5
5=	BRADSPORT	3.5
5=	MASCOT	3.5
5=	SPRAYWAY	3.5
	All others	17.8

Table 3. Most popular coats or jackets for all-year-around wear

Percentage ownership for all-year use		
Position	Make	%
1	BARBOUR	43.5
2	BERGHAUS	8.6
3	PETER STORM	7.5
4	FJÄLLRÄVEN	6.5
5	MASCOT	3.8
6	SPRAYWAY	3.2
7	BRITTON	2.7
	All others	24.2

*Berghaus* achieved second place for winter and year-around wear, closely followed by *Mascot* for the winter and *Peter Storm* for year-around wear. *Peter Storm* jackets were the most popular for summer use, ownership being exactly equal to that of *Barbour*. The Swedish *Fjällräven* jackets were always well positioned, being fifth in the winter 'league table', fourth for year-around wear and the third most popular in summer. It is worth noting that, at all seasons, ten makes dominated the top places: *Belstaff* (winter), *Bradspport* (summer), *Britton* (all-year), *Greenspot* (summer & all-year) and *Sprayway* (all-year), in addition to the five already noted.

**The most highly rated coats and jackets**

Birdwatchers were asked to make a total assessment of their garments, taking into account such attributes as rainproof/windproof quality, durability, number and size of pockets, correct lengths as required, lack of noisy rustle, presence of suitable hood if required, strength and durability of zips/press studs, warmth in cold weather, required coolness in hot weather, non sweat-inducing quality, compactness for carrying, sombre colour/camouflage, and so on. The results of these assessments (table 4) show that, of the most popular coats and jackets—those most widely owned by birdwatchers—*Barbour*, *Fjällräven* and *Berghaus* are those most highly rated. There are, however, many makes of clothing suitable for birdwatchers, with the result that only small samples appear in our survey result. It will be noted especially that *Helly Hansen*, *Rohan*, *Functional* and *Mountain Equipment* all achieved the highest possible rating of 'Excellent'.



**Table 4. The most highly rated coats and jackets for birdwatchers**

Performance of coats and jackets as rated by their owners.  
Performance rating: 6 = excellent, 5 = very good, 4 = good, 3 = satisfactory, 2 = poor, 1 = very poor

Position	Make	Performance rating						Sample < 20 = *	Average performance rating
		6	5	4	3	2	1		
1	HELLY HANSEN	7	0	0	0	0	0	*	Excellent 6.00
2	ROHAN	6	4	0	0	0	0	*	Excellent 5.60
3	FUNCTIONAL	9	7	0	0	0	0	*	Excellent 5.56
4	MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT	5	2	1	0	0	0	*	Excellent 5.50
5	GRENFELL	6	8	0	0	0	0	*	Very good 5.43
6	BARBOUR	181	125	25	16	5	1		Very good 5.30
7	TIKLAS	5	9	1	1	0	0	*	Very good 5.13
8=	BRITTON	2	9	2	0	0	0	*	Very good 5.00
8=	WALKABOUT	0	5	0	0	0	0	*	Very good 5.00
10	FJÄLLRÄVEN	11	25	6	4	0	0		Very good 4.93
11	ULTIMATE	2	10	4	0	0	0	*	Very good 4.88
12	BERGHAUS	22	24	4	4	6	0		Very good 4.87
13	GREENSPOT	1	16	5	0	0	0		Very good 4.82
14	MASCOT	9	16	12	4	0	0		Very good 4.73
15=	BRADSPORT	2	1	2	1	0	0	*	Very good 4.67
15=	DAMART/GOREDALE	2	2	0	2	0	0	*	Very good 4.67
15=	MACBEAN	0	4	2	0	0	0	*	Very good 4.67
18=	HUSKY	2	4	4	2	0	0	*	Very good 4.50
18=	KEEPERWARE	2	2	2	2	0	0	*	Very good 4.50
18=	SPRAYWAY	5	7	7	5	0	0		Very good 4.50
21	MARKS & SPENCER	0	4	6	0	0	0	*	Good 4.40
22	PETER STORM	11	27	20	12	3	1		Good 4.38
23	NEVISSPORT	0	2	4	0	0	0	*	Good 4.33
24	HENRI-LLOYD	2	2	2	4	0	0	*	Good 4.20
25=	NORTH CAPE	0	3	5	3	0	0	*	Good 4.00
25=	THORNPROOF	0	2	3	2	0	0	*	Good 4.00
25=	WALRUS	0	2	2	2	0	0	*	Good 4.00
28	BELSTAFF	4	6	4	8	6	0		Good 3.79

**Value for money**

Readers were asked to record whether they regarded their coat or jacket as value for money (table 5). Many of the lesser-known (and therefore seldom owned) makes achieved a high rating in this respect and all clearly deserve to be seriously considered when choosing a new coat or jacket. Among the popular makes, note should be taken that their owners considered *Greenspot*, *Sprayway*, *Mascot*, *Peter Storm*, *Barbour* and *Berghaus* to be particularly good value for money.

**The most satisfactory coats and jackets**

‘Would you buy the same again?’ One acid test of a good product is a ‘Yes’ in reply to this question. The questionnaire answers (table 6) show that all the owners of six makes—*Bradsport*, *Functional*, *Grenfell*, *Helly Hansen*, *Marks & Spencer* and *Rohan*—would buy the same garment again. In the opinion of the owners, the most satisfactory of the popular makes were *Greenspot*, *Barbour* and *Berghaus*.

**Table 5. Best-value-for-money coats and jackets for birdwatchers**  
Proportion of owners regarding their garment as being 'value for money'

Position	Make	Proportion	Sample < 20 = *	%
1=	BRADSPORT	5/5	*	100.0
1=	DAMART/GOREDALE	6/6	*	100.0
1=	FUNCTIONAL	16/16	*	100.0
1=	GREENSPOT	22/22		100.0
1=	GRENFELL	15/15	*	100.0
1=	HELLY HANSEN	7/7	*	100.0
1=	HENRI-LLOYD	10/10	*	100.0
1=	KEEPERWARE	8/8	*	100.0
1=	MACBEAN	6/6	*	100.0
1=	MARKS & SPENCER	9/9	*	100.0
1=	MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT	8/8	*	100.0
1=	NEVISSPORT	6/6	*	100.0
1=	NORTH CAPE	11/11	*	100.0
1=	SPRAYWAY	24/24		100.0
1=	THORNPROOF	7/7	*	100.0
1=	ULTIMATE	16/16	*	100.0
1=	WALKABOUT	5/5	*	100.0
1=	WALRUS	6/6	*	100.0
19	MASCOT	39/41		95.1
20	PETER STORM	68/74		91.9
21	BARBOUR	323/353		91.5
22	BERGHAUS	54/60		90.0
23	TIKLAS	14/16	*	87.5
24	BRITTON	11/13	*	84.6
25	HUSKY	10/12	*	83.3
26	ROHAN	8/10	*	80.0
27	FJÄLLRÄVEN	34/46		73.9
28	BELSTAFF	16/28		57.1

**Table 6. The most satisfactory coats and jackets for birdwatchers**  
Coats and jackets which their owners would choose to buy again

Position	Make	Proportion	Sample < 20 = *	%
1=	BRADSPORT	5/5	*	100.0
1=	FUNCTIONAL	16/16	*	100.0
1=	GRENFELL	15/15	*	100.0
1=	HELLY HANSEN	7/7	*	100.0
1=	MARKS & SPENCER	9/9	*	100.0
1=	ROHAN	10/10	*	100.0
7	GREENSPOT	20/22		90.9
8	BARBOUR	311/353		88.1
9	BERGHAUS	50/60		83.3
10	TIKLAS	13/16	*	81.3
11	PETER STORM	56/74		75.7
12=	KEEPERWARE	6/8	*	75.0
12=	MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT	6/8	*	75.0
12=	ULTIMATE	12/16	*	75.0
15	FJÄLLRÄVEN	34/46		73.9
16	SPRAYWAY	17/24		70.8
17	MASCOT	29/41		70.7



### Choosing the right garment

The range of clothing available is greater even than that of binoculars. In most cases, the makes of garment named in this survey are unknown to the members of the Editorial Board of *British Birds* personally. Our survey results show our *readers'* opinions. It is possible that some manufacturers have now ceased to make the garments commented upon here (a long-wearing jacket may outlast its manufacturing company). Our advice must be, therefore, to shop around, to see what is available, and to make your personal choice according to your own special requirements, but perhaps to be influenced in favour of the top makes revealed by our survey, such as *Barbour*, *Berghaus*, *Fjällräven*, *Functional*, *Greenspot*, *Grenfell*, *Helly Hansen*, *Mascot*, *Mountain Equipment*, *Rohan*, *Sprayway*, and *Peter Storm*. It is likely that the best garments for birdwatchers will be advertised each month within the advertisement sections of *British Birds*, as well as being mentioned in this short report.

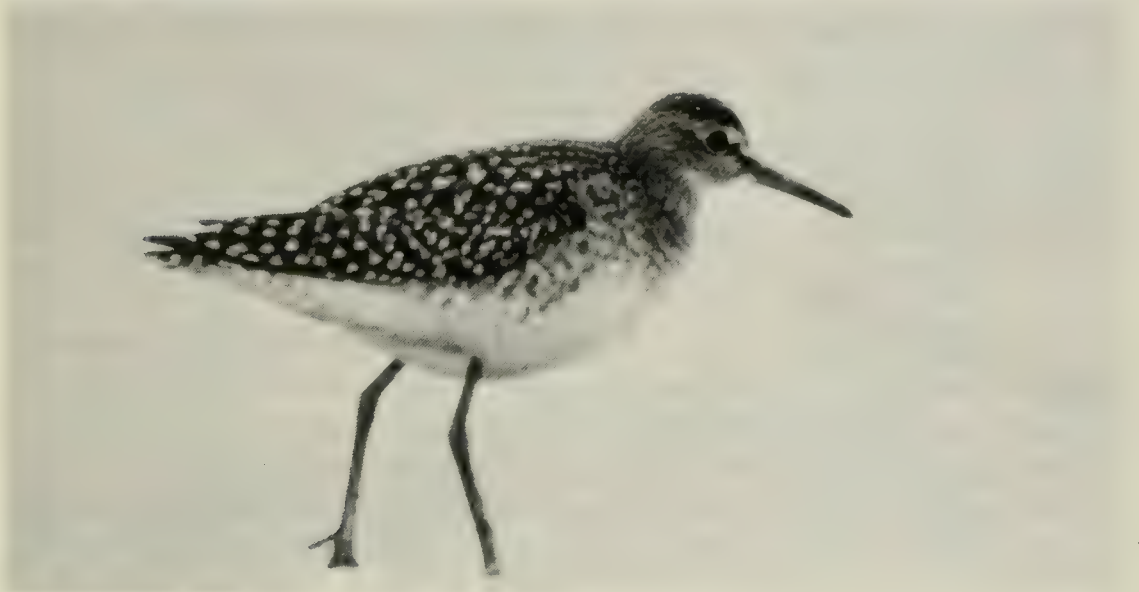
### Acknowledgments

We are very grateful to the many *British Birds* readers who went to the considerable trouble to fill in our questionnaire and return it to us, making this survey report possible. Collation of the data for this report was carried out by Stephen Forrest. We thank A. B. Moore and T. J. Stokes, of Bedford Outdoor Centre, Allhallows, Bedford, for assistance with details of manufacturers.

*Dr J. T. R. Sharrock, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ*

## Mystery photographs

**112** The shape of the wader shown in plate 69 (repeated here), with its moderately long bill and legs, immediately suggests one of the *Tringa* species. The *Calidris* waders are more compactly built, and, except for juvenile Sanderling *C. alba*, lack the spotted plumage of the mystery





109. Juvenile Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, Cornwall, August 1974 (J. B. & S. Bottomley)



110. Adult Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, Kent, July 1981 (R. J. Chandler)

111. Juvenile Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Kent, July 1983 (R. J. Chandler)





bird. The extensive white spots of juvenile Sanderlings, however, give them a chequered rather than a spotted appearance; they also lack a hind toe, clearly present on the bird in plates 69 & 108. Other 'spotted' waders include Golden *Charadrius apricaria*, Lesser Golden *C. dominica* and Grey Plovers *C. squatarola* in their juvenile plumages, but these three species share the short-necked and short-billed profile typical of plovers, quite unlike the mystery bird.

In juvenile plumage, all *Tringa* species are more-or-less spotted, but this effect is lacking in their adult plumage. The mystery bird is thus a juvenile. At this stage, assuming that the bird's size is not easily judged, the length and shape of its bill can be used to eliminate all but the smaller of the *Tringa* waders, leaving the medium-sized Green *T. ochropus* and Wood Sandpipers *T. glareola*, Lesser Yellowlegs *T. flavipes* and also, perhaps, young and still-short-billed Redshanks *T. totanus*.

When juveniles of these species are compared on the ground, useful distinguishing characters are the extent of pale spotting on the upperparts, the facial pattern and the leg colour. Wood and Green Sandpipers are extensively spotted, Wood the more so, with larger spots, especially noticeable on its tertials, though above it is paler and browner than Green Sandpiper. Lesser Yellowlegs and Redshank both have smaller pale spots, and appear almost speckled, rather than spotted. Though all four species have a dark area between bill and eye which may in some lights create the impression of a pale supercilium, such a feature is most obvious on a Wood

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**112.** Mystery photograph 113. Identify the species. Answer next month



Sandpiper, whilst Green Sandpiper usually shows a comparatively prominent pale eye-ring, emphasised by the entire side to its head being somewhat darker. In comparison, Lesser Yellowlegs and Redshank lack distinguishing facial characters.

In colour, the mystery bird would have shown fairly pale yellowish or greenish-brown legs, eliminating Green Sandpiper (darker, olive-green legs) and young Redshanks (orange legs).

The mystery bird, then, is a juvenile Wood Sandpiper. Plates 109, 110 and 111 show juvenile and adult Green Sandpipers, and juvenile Redshank for comparison. If flushed, the calls of all four species are diagnostic. Moreover, the very distinctive dark wings (above and below), contrasting strikingly with white rump and under-body, immediately indicate Green Sandpiper; while the white secondaries, rump and back distinguish Redshank. Lesser Yellowlegs and Wood Sandpiper have similar flight patterns, with white rump and plain upperwings, much less 'black-and-white' than Green Sandpiper. There are, in fact, many similarities between Wood Sandpiper and Lesser Yellowlegs, especially with individuals of the former which have particularly bright legs. As a result, care must be taken with these two species, the more spotted and compact appearance of Wood Sandpiper being a useful pointer to identification.

The mystery bird was photographed by Eric Hosking in Suffolk in August 1960. It has been published previously in *British Birds* (55: plate 84), misidentified then, on the strength of its spotted plumage, as an adult summer Green Sandpiper. As you can see here (plate 110), however, Green Sandpipers at this time of year actually have very little spotting.

R. J. CHANDLER

## Notes



**Juvenile-plumaged Great Crested Grebe in spring** From 27th April to 10th May 1984, a Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* present at Llanishen and Lisvane Reservoirs, South Glamorgan, was in juvenile plumage, showing the characteristic black-and-white head and neck pattern of that age (see fig. 1). PHILLIP BRISTOW and NIGEL ODIN

10 Lisvane Street, Cathays, Cardiff, South Glamorgan CF2 4LL

Most observers would be surprised to see a juvenile Great Crested Grebe in April, but *BWP* notes that February egg-laying is regular in Britain, and January egg-laying has been recorded. EDS

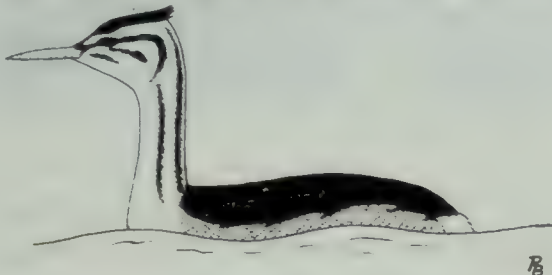


Fig. 1. Juvenile Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, South Glamorgan, April-May 1984 (Phillip Bristow)



**Bewick's Swan with yellow legs** On 1st January 1984, among a flock of about 70 Bewick's Swans *Cygnus columbianus* at Sopley in the Avon valley, Hampshire, I noticed one individual with yellow legs. Watching from a car, down to 15 m, I noted that the colour was almost as bright as that on the bill.

A. M. HANBY

*Flat 3, St Mary's Hospital, Milton Road, Portsmouth, Hampshire*

Dr M. A. Ogilvie has drawn attention to the statement in *BWP* 'For bare part colours in leucistic birds, see Evans and Lebreton (1973),' and commented as follows: 'This paper is in *Wildfowl* (24: 61-62), and describes Bewick's Swans with, among other things, yellow legs, often also with red or pinkish bills; the latter, however can be normal yellow-and-black, or become that way with age; the birds described occurred at Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, and in the Netherlands. There has since been a trickle of occurrences, including two in the Netherlands in 1983/84, one in Lancashire in the same winter, and a pink-legged individual at Slimbridge in 1984/85. The condition is rare, but does not produce any possible identification problems.' Eds

**Eleonora's Falcon in North Humberside** In late October or early November 1981, the young son of P. R. Greensides of Elm Tree Farm, Patrington in Holderness, North Humberside, announced to his father that there was a dead hawk in the garden. Mr Greensides thought nothing of it at the time, as dead crows *Corvus* and the like were often found about the farmland, and not until two days later, whilst he was picking Brussels sprouts, was he reminded of his son's statement, for, lying between the rows—quite dead, but otherwise in good condition—was a large hawk.



**113 & 114.** Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora* found dead at Patrington, North Humberside, late October or early November 1981 (*J. Cudworth*)

He took it into the house and remembers showing the body to some friends on bonfire night, 5th November. If the Greensides family had not been interested in things of the countryside, the body might have been committed to the flames, and the record lost forever, but the corpse was,



instead, put into a deep-freezer. Later, it was learned that a gentleman in nearby Hedon did 'a bit of taxidermy', whereupon the corpse was taken to him for preservation. To his credit, the taxidermist, D. Baker, correctly identified the bird as an Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora* and set it up as a mount.

Some time during 1982, whilst on a visit to Spurn Point, Mr Greensides casually mentioned the incident to B. R. Spence, warden for the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, who asked if it would be possible to see the specimen. When he was eventually able to examine the bird, he was not a little surprised to find that it was indeed an Eleonora's Falcon. The owner very kindly agreed to leave the bird at the Observatory, where several people were able to see it.

It was a second-year, in good plumage, the pale tips of the old feathers being abraded off: a quite natural process. The plumage was otherwise in perfect condition, with new feathers moulting in on the mantle, and showing no signs whatsoever of the bird ever having been in captivity. Several photographs were taken by J. Cudworth and B. S. Pashby (plates 113 & 114).

Eleonora's Falcons breed on the cliffs of the islands and adjacent coasts of the Mediterranean and spend the winter in Madagascar and East Africa. There is only one other record in Britain and Ireland: one at Formby, Merseyside, on 8th and 9th October 1977. Singles have also wandered north to Poland in 1982 and 1984, Sweden in 1983 and Bulgaria in 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 76: 273; 77: 588; 78: 640).

The mounted specimen was returned to Mr Greensides, to whom I am extremely grateful for the information which led to the documentation of this exciting record.

JOHN R. MATHER

*Eagle Lodge, Aspin Lane, Knaresborough, North Yorkshire*



**Great Grey Phalarope in West Midlands** The sole British occurrence of Great Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus giganticus* was a first-winter individual which was photographed in Wolverhampton, West Midlands, after strong October gales in 1983 (plate 115). The shape and plumage of this species are identical to those of Grey Phalarope *P. fulicarius*, the only distinguishing feature being the size (about 18 cm for *fulicarius*; about 200 cm for *giganticus*).

GARY PALMER

42 Finchfield Lane, Merry Hill, Wolverhampton WV3 8EF



115. First-winter Great Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus giganticus*, West Midlands, October 1983 (Gary Palmer)

The full details of this occurrence were originally submitted to the Managing Editor, who felt unable to assess this unique record himself, so passed it to the Rarities Committee for expert evaluation. Members' comments during postal circulation included the following.

A. R. Dean noted that 'This is, in fact, a common species in the West Midlands, but is, unfortunately, polymorphic, both in size and plumage. Approximately 10% of the records submitted annually to the West Midlands Bird Club can be attributed to this species. It can appear superficially like almost *any* species, but more commonly shows characters of up to ten *different* species. Perhaps its most consistent character, however, is its tendency to get rejected by records committees.'

T. P. Inskipp made an interesting evolutionary speculation: 'Gigantism is known in some other British species (e.g. *Erithacus rubecula arespebiensis*, which is an extremely sedentary form known from some reserves, occasionally emitting a muffled jingle). This may be an example of convergent evolution so it would be interesting to learn more about its behaviour.'

P. J. Grant, on the other hand, considered that 'This is actually a perfectly normal-sized Grey Phalarope, and shows just how easy it is to fall into the trap of 'reversed size-illusion' which results in photographs taken with very wide-angle lenses. This makes nearer objects appear much smaller than they would do if they were farther away than the observer. Comparison of the size of the eucalyptus tree leaves with the bricks on the chimney stack indicates that the roof-slates on the left-hand house are actually smaller than those on the right-hand house, although that is not how they appear: this provides further proof that size is unimportant. Pend.'

D. J. Britton noted that 'Whilst I may be doing the observer an injustice, there would seem

to be sufficient grounds for doubting this extremely unlikely occurrence, since the locality is claimed to be Wolverhampton, but the architecture is unmistakably that of Peterborough.'

D. J. Holman's succinct comment summarises our final editorial conclusion: 'Must accept. Photographs can't lie.' Eds

**Pallid Swifts in Dorset** At 09.00 GMT on the unseasonably warm, sunny and windless morning of 10th November 1984, Mick and Win Rogers saw a Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* fly past the observatory at Portland Bill, Dorset. Shortly afterwards, GW, MC and J. Williamson relocated the bird over the Bill car-park. It headed off northwards and later settled down to feed over Top Fields, where it remained until midday, at which point it moved off northwards. After a brief appearance at Southwell, the bird was relocated along with a second individual by MC, P. Harris and others, feeding over an area of waste ground in the Grove area in the north of Portland. Towards dusk, both birds disappeared from sight below the level of the houses and were not seen again. The following description was noted:

**PLUMAGE** General ground colour grey-brown, probably a shade darker than, for example, Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* or Alpine Swift *A. melba*. Head grey-brown, with off-white or greyish-white forehead and large white throat patch, contrasting sharply with blackish eye patch. At distance, or when head-on, both individuals appeared to have almost white heads. Dark eye patch visible only when viewed at close range, but became very conspicuous feature during low-level side-on views. Body coloration grey-brown, appearing paler on vent, undertail-coverts and rump, especially when viewed in bright sunlight at moderate ranges. On closer inspection, against a background, these areas did not appear paler, but were seen to be mottled; mottling formed by pale (whitish?) margins to many feathers and, to lesser degree, on lower breast, flanks and mantle. Lesser, median and outermost primary coverts blackish, darker than body; outermost primaries as coverts; greater coverts, inner primaries and secondaries very pale

grey-brown, contrasting with rest of wing and body. At distance, in bright sunlight, this area appeared as a pale flash as the birds flapped their wings, being almost translucent from above or below the wing. Tail grey-brown as upperparts, a shade darker than rump.

**BARE PARTS** Bill and eye dark. Legs not visible.

**SHAPE, STRUCTURE AND FLIGHT ACTION** With no Swifts *A. apus* present comparisons of such features were rather subjective, but the following observations were made. Pallid Swifts appeared stockier, stouter, blunter-headed and broader-winged, with more rounded wing tips. This resulted in noticeably different flight action: wing-beats slower and more deliberate, more akin to those of Alpine Swift. Wing-beats also interspersed with more frequent, longer glides. No apparent difference in tail shape or depth of fork.

These two birds constitute the third and fourth records of Pallid Swift in Britain and Ireland, the previous records being at Stodmarsh, Kent, during 13th-21st May 1978 (*Brit. Birds* 74: 170-178) and at Farlington Marsh, Hampshire, on 20th May 1983 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 508).

G. WALBRIDGE and M. CADE  
1c Avalanche Road, Portland, Dorset DT5 2DJ



# Letters

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**Escapes?** Some years ago, Derek Goodwin and the late Derrick England published some long comments on the problem for birdwatchers of escaped cage birds (*Brit. Birds* 49: 339-349; 67: 177-197). Since those papers, a new generation of birders has appeared, to whom the origin of stray rarities is often of considerable interest. Some points stressed to me by Derrick England in conversation are, I believe, worth repetition.

First, almost any species, except perhaps a shearwater (Procellariidae), albatross (Diomedidae), petrel (Hydrobatidae) or swift (Apodidae), could potentially be an escape from captivity. Surprisingly, almost all other groups are kept in captivity, and many are often bred in aviaries.

Secondly, tameness should not be taken as evidence—one way or the other—of escape likelihood. An escaped cage bird can be shyer, and even wilder and more prone to take flight, than wild individuals of the same species. Equally, such an individual can be approachable and tame. Conversely, a wild individual—if it is sick or injured or tired or hungry (as it may well be if newly arrived after a long sea-crossing), or if it has never seen a human being before (as, for instance, many Arctic-bred juveniles will not have)—may be tame and confiding and even feed from the hand.

Thirdly, generally abraded and dirty plumage should not be taken as evidence of a captive origin. Derrick England delighted in telling me that the scruffiest Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus* that he had ever seen was a wild one in India. Most cage birds are kept by people who look after them well, and immaculate plumage is the rule rather than the exception. It follows, therefore, that immaculate plumage should not be taken as evidence of a wild origin.

Any sick or moulting individual may stay 'off-plumage' for some time until it recovers or grows new feathers. A lost tail, for instance, can induce a vagrant to stay for ten days or more while it grows a new tail. Long-staying, out-of-season birds are, therefore, not necessarily escapes from captivity.

## *To summarise:*

Wildness is not evidence for (or against) a wild origin.

Tameness is not evidence for (or against) a captive origin.

Tattiness is not evidence for (or against) a captive origin.

Immaculate plumage is not evidence for (or against) a wild origin.

These points are not new, but they do deserve to be remembered by those who submit records of rarities, and by those who assess them, both locally and nationally.

J. T. R. SHARROCK

*Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ*

When assessing the possibility of captive origin, the Rarities Committee may make a decision by a vote; if six or more of the ten members consider that a particular rare bird has probably or certainly escaped from captivity, it is not included in the main list or in the species totals in the annual 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain', but is nevertheless always mentioned in the comments, for future reference (e.g. the Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* in Humberside in March 1984, *Brit. Birds* 78: 536). Eds

**Field guides, sex and the size of birds** We recently published a short article in *New Scientist* (22 November 1984, page 44) and feel that its gist may be of interest to readers of *British Birds*. There is, we believe, a distinct sexual bias among bird artists and others, which leads to male birds being incorrectly depicted as larger (and female birds as smaller) than they are in reality.

The three field guides most widely used by birdwatchers throughout Europe are probably *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* by Roger Tory Peterson, Guy Mountfort and P. A. D. Hollom, *The Birds of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East* by Hermann Heinzel, Richard Fitter and John Parslow, and *The Hamlyn Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* by Bertel Bruun and Arthur Singer.

Accurate information on the sizes of each sex of many European birds has now been published in the first three volumes of *BWP*. From these data, the expected ratios of male to female length can be calculated and comparison made with the apparent ratios portrayed in the field guides. We were able to measure illustrations of some 61 species where both sexes were shown. Some striking anomalies emerge, and these anomalies are consistent across the field guides. Officially, 15 of the 61 species are those in which the females are the larger sex, often by a substantial amount. As illustrated in the guides, however, males are shown incorrectly to be the larger sex on average in 60% of these cases.

Conversely, while males are definitely larger in 75% of the total sample, they are portrayed as being apparently larger in no less than 90% of the total. When the guides illustrate a species in which females are the larger sex, they portray the size difference as less than actually exists, and frequently reverse the difference in favour of males. On the other hand, when a species is shown where the male is genuinely larger than the female, the size difference is exaggerated even further in favour of the males.

In the animal kingdom as a whole, larger female size is the norm. Even among the birds and mammals, large female size is still quite widespread.

PAUL GREENWOOD and JONATHAN ADAMS

*Department of Adult Education, University of Durham*

*Department of Pure and Applied Zoology, Baines Wing, Leeds LS2 9JT*

**Pink Black-headed Gulls** The apparent rarity of pink Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* in Britain (*Brit. Birds* 75: 536; 77: 615) prompts the following. The total breeding population of Black-headed Gulls along the Trondheimsfjord in Sør-Trøndelag county, mid Norway, is estimated at about 10,000 individuals, of which about 97% are migratory, Britain being an important wintering ground. During the spring migration in March-April, Black-headed Gulls with pink breasts are especially common, involving up to 50% of the birds, which are usually seen in flocks of 100-300 or more. The pink colour varies from a faint touch to almost as deep a pink as that of a flamingo (Phoenicopteridae). Pink gulls are also not uncommon throughout the summer, and even a few of the wintering birds show pink breasts. It is a fact that the spring migration and the body moult of the



Black-headed Gull coincide with the spring bloom of algae and crustaceans in mid Norwegian waters. There is a similar bloom in the autumn, but it is not so marked because of the turnover of the water masses.

In my opinion, Black-headed Gulls acquire their pink coloration simply by feeding on the large quantities of crustaceans, a common food, available in the spring (see *BWP* 2). It is also well known that the crustaceans concerned, both in spring and in autumn, can give strong pink coloration to domestic hens (and to the yolk of their eggs) and to trout *Salmo* from fish farms when fed to them.

ØYSTEIN R. STØRKERSEN

Devlesvingen 5A, N-7000 Trondheim, Norway

**Breeding areas of Grey Hypocolius** Graham Bundy's concise and illuminating PhotoSpot article on the Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* (*Brit. Birds* 78: 93-95) stated that it breeds in southern Pakistan, but not in Arabia, as mapped by Harrison (1982). Meinertzhagen, with first-hand experience of Saudi Arabia, wrote (1954) that it was certainly resident from Birka north of Mecca to the Wadi Fatima and, presumably, Colin Harrison's range map is based on this reliable observer.

Despite over 34 years' residence in Pakistan, I have only recently become familiar with the Grey Hypocolius, and I know of no evidence of its having bred anywhere within Pakistan. Ali & Ripley (1972), described its status as a rare vagrant to the subcontinent, with only six authentic records since the 1870s up to the present day. Recent sightings by myself and colleagues suggest that it is by no means rare in southern Baluchistan. This region is, however, very inaccessible, both geographically and politically, so it is quite possible that the Hypocolius breeds within this region of Pakistan. Paludan (1959), while collecting in Seistan, in adjacent areas of southern Afghanistan, found males in breeding condition (testes enlarged and injected) at the end of April. I encountered a flock of nearly 30 on 30th April 1985 at Zangi Nawar lake in the Chaghai region of southwestern Baluchistan. From their behaviour, they were close to breeding condition, keeping mostly in pairs and calling incessantly and excitedly. Regrettably, it may be a long time before this region can be adequately surveyed ornithologically, and the very nomadic behaviour of this desert-adapted frugivorous bird adds to the difficulty of locating its breeding grounds.

TOM ROBERTS

*Cae Gors, Rhoscefnhir, near Pentraeth, Anglesey, Gwynedd LL75 8YU*

Jennings (1981) was aware of the statement by Meinertzhagen (1954) that it was resident, but stated that 'There is no field evidence of breeding in Saudi Arabia, and there are no Arabian eggs of this species at the British Museum (NH)'. Eds

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**'British status and identification of Greenish Warbler'** In Appendix I of this paper (*Brit. Birds* 78: 450), three previously accepted records were stated to be still under review. They were at Easington, Humberside, during 28th-30th August 1968, Holme, Norfolk, on 9th November 1968, and Wells, Norfolk, on 21st (actually 20th to 21st) August 1977. After reassessment, these three records remain accepted.

M. J. ROGERS

*4 Pentland Flats, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly TR21 0HY*

## Announcements

### EXCLUSIVE OFFER TO 'BB' SUBSCRIBERS

#### **'Shorebirds: an identification guide to the waders of the world'**

We should like to remind readers that this book can still be ordered at the special reduced prepublication

price, available *only* to 'BB' subscribers. You can order it now, for £18.45 (post free to UK & Irish addresses), saving £1.50 on the full price of £19.95. Please use the order form on page xiii.

**'The Birds of Africa'** The second volume is due to be published this summer. The full price will be £65.00, but we can offer it at the prepublication price of £49.50. Volume I is still available, at £59.50. Anyone purchasing both volumes as part of the prepublication offer can obtain them for £99.00, a saving of £25.50 (both volumes will be despatched together, as soon as volume II is available). These prepublication offers are not exclusive to 'BB' subscribers, but the publishers, Academic Press, have assured us that the prices which we are offering will not be bettered elsewhere, so we hope that 'BB' subscribers will order their copies by using the British BirdShop form on page xiii.

**New books available through British BirdShop** As well as *Shorebirds: an identification guide to the waders of the world*, and volume 2 of *The Birds of Africa* (see above) the following new books are available in British BirdShop this month:

Bruun, Svensson & Delin *The Country Life Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe*

Savory *George Lodge: artist naturalist*

Please use the order form on page xiii.

**'BB' Binders** The demand for the new loose-leaf folders (which hold 12 issues and the index) was so great that what we thought was an ample stock ran out just before Christmas. A new supply was ordered as soon as the stock became low, and the binders are now available again. We apologise to those 500 or so subscribers who have had to wait for their binders.



**Free car stickers** Inserted with this issue of 'BB' you will find a car sticker. Rather than offering these for sale at, say, 30p each, or 'free if you send a SAE', we have decided to send one free to every subscriber. We hope that you will place your sticker prominently on your vehicle, since, as well as being your way of showing that you are a member of our elite club, you will thereby help to advertise and promote 'BB'.

**Date change: SWLA, BIY & RRA exhibition** The Society of Wildlife Artists' Annual Exhibition (including the display of winning entries for our 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' and 'The Richard Richardson Award' competitions) will be open to the public at The Mall Galleries, The Mall, London SW1 during 17th-27th July (NOT in September, as originally arranged).

## News and comment

*Mike Everett and Robin Prytherch*

**Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'**

**Djibouti II** The Preliminary Report of their second expedition to Djibouti has been prepared by Geoff and Hilary Welch and makes mouthwatering reading—60,897 Steppe Eagles *Aquila nipalensis* on passage, Djibouti Francolins *Francolinus ochropectus* at a new site, new information on numbers and distribution of Arabian Bustards *Ardeotis arabs*, 224 species noted with 59 new for the country—and so on. We look forward to the publication of the full report, hopefully in the next two or three months. It will be available, price £4 including postage or £5 by air mail, from Geoff and Hilary at 2 Springholme, Caudle Hill, Fairburn, Knottingley, Yorkshire WF11 9JQ. Order now to avoid disappointment!

**Mistnets in The Gambia** Peter Robinson, Senior Investigations Officer at the RSPB, recently received a letter from Eddie Brewer, of the Wildlife Conservation Department of the Ministry of Water Resources and Environment in The Gambia, expressing concern over a recent incident involving British ringers mistnetting there without prior liaison with the Ministry. Eddie points out that, in future, no mistnetting will be allowed without prior permission from the Ministry. It is obviously important to avoid a repetition of this particular incident, but we would also make the point that it is important to liaise

with the appropriate authorities in *any* overseas country. The BTO Ringing Office can usually help with advice. A second point, Peter reminds us, is that there has been at least one recent incident involving illegal bird-catching by the use of mistnets in West Africa—so *bona fide* ringers who have not gained permission to work in an area could find themselves mistaken for trappers. Equally, it should not be assumed that all the people seen using mistnets abroad are ornithologists: a check with the local authorities could be worthwhile.

**Pennies from heaven** We are grateful to June Irvine for drawing our attention to her small note in the *Newsletter* (Winter 1985-86: No 29) she edits for the Hampshire Ornithological Society. It tells how, when putting food out on her bird table, she found a £1 coin lying there! Magpies are suspected, but have not in fact been seen on the table. She asks for other suggestions—but send these to June, please, not to us (4 Clarence Road, Lyndhurst, Hampshire SO1 7AL). If you do write, why not ask about the *Newsletter* too? It is an excellent, regular bulletin on what's going on in the county.

**Cape Clear** The new Bookings Secretary for Cape Clear Bird Observatory is Kieran

Grace, 13 Castilla Park, Clontarf, Dublin 3, Ireland, from whom information on rates, and so on may be obtained.

**The Birds of Berkeley** This interesting booklet gives an annotated checklist of the birds recorded along the banks of the Severn near Berkeley from 1976 to 1983, with an Appendix covering 1984. It is available (£1.45 including postage) from G. Moyser, 20 Tennyson Road, Dursley, Gloucestershire.

**Seabird Colony Register** We welcome back Dr Clare Lloyd, who has been in Ohio for three years. Clare writes to tell us that the Seabird Group is drawing up a Register which will provide a post-1969 computerised database with as many up-to-date counts as possible for the whole UK coast. A lot of new counts were made in 1985, but there are still many gaps (especially in Scotland) and an all-out effort is to be made to fill these in 1986-87. Counters are needed urgently: if you can help, get in touch with Clare at NCC, Wynne-Edwards House, 17 Rubislaw Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1XE (tel. 0224-572863).

**OBC birdwatch** The Oriental Bird Club is staging a sponsored birdwatch on 24th May 1986, mainly in Norfolk, to help establish the Club's Conservation Fund, which will be used to support research and publications of direct conservation relevance. Anyone can take part: details from Mark Cocker, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

**Cyprus news** Bill Oddie has shown us an encouraging letter from Adrian Akers-Douglas of Friends of the Earth (Cyprus), giving news of the campaign against the mass destruction of birds on the island. The important part reads '... it seems that almost all liming and netting has ceased. We have had the occasional report of limited and discrete liming going on, but no reports of nets at all. I personally visited all the worst areas during the height of the autumn migration and whereas last year (1984) there were literally hundreds of nets around, this year I found not a single one! In practical conservation terms, this means about 18 million birds did *not* die on their way through Cyprus this year.' This obviously represents real progress: we look forward to more news from Bill, who is visiting Cyprus this spring.

## Recent reports



*Ian Dawson and Keith Allsopp*

**These are largely unchecked reports, not authenticated records**

The dates in this report refer to January unless otherwise stated.

After two days of unsettled, mild westerlies at the beginning of the month, cold air arrived from the north, bringing a sharp drop in temperatures. A change to easterlies as

high pressure developed over Scandinavia brought further cold but settled weather until 10th, when strong but mild westerlies pushed in from the Atlantic. These were blocked by high pressure to the west on 15th as cold northerly air covered the country, being replaced once again by westerlies on 18th.



only to change back after 24th when severe overnight frost iced over many inland waters. Very cold, cloudy, dull weather followed as the winds turned easterly with rising pressure over Scandinavia.



### Seabirds

The year got off to a quiet start with seabirds providing the month's main interest. Small numbers of **Pomarine Skuas** *Stercorarius pomarinus* remained to entertain both sea- and reservoir-watchers: about 50 were in the inner Moray Firth (Highland) and up to ten in the Thames Estuary (Essex/Kent), with inland individuals at the Ouse Washes (Cambridgeshire) on 4th and 5th, at Queen Mary Reservoir (Greater London) on 3rd and 4th and at Staines Reservoir (Surrey) on 14th. A three-and-a-half hour seawatch on Boxing Day afternoon off Huttoft (Lincolnshire) provided not only 19 **Pomarine Skuas**, but also three **Great Skuas** *S. skua*, one **Iceland Gull** *Larus glaucoides*, 14 **Glaucous Gulls** *L. hyperboreus*, a **Little Auk** *Alle alle* and a **Leach's Petrel** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*, as well as 7,280 **Herring Gulls** *L. argentatus* of which an estimated 80% were of the nominate Scandinavian race. Also on 26th and 27th December there was a **Long-tailed Skua** *S. longicaudus* at Reculver (Kent), and a **Great Skua** appeared inland on 19th at Bassenthwaite Lake (Cumbria). Numbers of white-winged gulls increased steadily, and were widespread, especially inland, though less numerous than usual in their favoured haunts of the north and west. There were two **Iceland Gulls** at Hanningfield Reservoir (Essex) from 17th, and many reports of singles and twos of **Glaucous Gulls**, though the only larger counts reported away from

their usual localities were fours at Hanningfield and at Sandwich Bay (Kent), and three at Dungeness (Kent) on 19th. **Iceland Gulls** of the Nearctic race *kumlien* known as Kumlien's Gull were reported from Newlyn (Cornwall) and Wexford (Co. Wexford) on 27th. On the debit side, the famous New Brighton (Merseyside) Iceland Gull, first recorded at the end of 1955, failed to reappear, having last been seen on 4th May 1985.



The now usual reports of **Ring-billed Gulls** *L. delawarensis* included at least 14 in Ireland and the west of Britain, as well as a second-winter bird briefly at Pagham (West Sussex) on 27th December. A scattering of **Mediterranean Gulls** *L. melanocephalus* included a first-winter bird at Cardiff (South Glamorgan) from 26th December to about 12th, wearing an East German ring originating from the Baltic. The Newcastle (Tyne & Wear) **Laughing Gull** *L. atricilla* continued to entertain (plate 119), while from the Arctic an adult **Sabine's Gull** *L. sabini* which had decided to stay north graced Benllech (Gwynedd) on New Year's Day, and, right at the end, the star bird of the month, a first-winter **Ivory Gull** *Pagophila eburnea* which delighted observers at Saltburn (Cleveland) (plates 117 & 118). A **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* continued to put in an occasional appearance in the Firth of Forth (Lothian), and another was blown in to Holyhead (Anglesey) on 19th, staying into February.

The expected reports of divers and scarce grebes on inland waters were few, but included both **Red-throated** *Gavia stellata* and **Black-throated Divers** *G. arctica* at Little Paxton (Cambridgeshire), and a **Slavonian Grebe** *Podiceps auritus* at New Hythe Lakes (Kent). The Whalsay ferry (Shetland) **White-billed Diver** *G. adamsii* was still around, although a new arrival was one at Ardglass (Co. Down) from 2nd February.



### Wading birds

Wandering **Bitterns** *Botaurus stellaris* were seen at Slapton (Devon) on 8th, at Sandwich Bay on 15th and Upton Warren (Hereford & Worcester) from 25th, while in the southwest of England a **Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* remained near Plymouth (Devon), and a **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* stayed the month near Yeovil (Somerset) (plate 120).

After disappearing, the **Sociable Plover** *Chettusia gregaria* returned to the Sompting area (West Sussex), and **Long-billed Dowitchers** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* were seen on-and-off at Old Hall Marshes (Essex) and on Scilly. Up to 225 **Avocets** *Recurvirostra avosetta* graced the Snape/Iken area of Suffolk early in the month, and a raft of 16, swimming amongst Shelducks *Tadorna tadorna* and Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* on the Thames off East Tilbury (Essex) on 26th, was an unusual sight.

Single **Cranes** *Grus grus* remained into the New Year in Co. Cork and at Caerlaverock (Dumfries & Galloway), while the east Norfolk flock rose to five. The Pagham **Sora** *Porzana carolina* was seen on 1st, and a **Spotted Crane** *P. porzana* was a surprise find on Walney (Cumbria) on 8th and 11th.

### Wildfowl

The wildfowl count on 13th produced a high total of over 4,000 **Bewick's Swans** *Cygnus columbianus* on the Ouse Washes, and, after flooding there, up to 2,000 could be found on the Nene Washes (Cambridgeshire). One of the nominate Nearctic race known as Whistling Swan was found with 30 Bewick's at Hay Moor, North Curry



116. Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*, Merseyside, January 1986 (Steve Young)

(Somerset), on 5th, and the individual on Wexford Slobs (Co. Wexford) was still present. The white Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens* there is, it appears, a **Greater Snow Goose** *A. c. atlanticus*, probably much scarcer than the nominate race in Britain and Ireland. Other **Snow Geese** included birds in Norfolk and at Marshside (Merseyside). (plate 116) both with Pink-footed Geese *A. brachyrhynchus*. A **Lesser White-fronted Goose** *A. erythropus* of unknown origin was with Brent Geese *Branta bernicla* on the Exe Estuary (Devon) from December, and a **Trumpeter Swan** *C. buccinator* at Blenheim (Oxfordshire) from mid month gained brief notoriety on television, but must surely have been an escape. There was a high count of 3,000 **Greylag Geese** *A. anser* in the Eden Valley (Cumbria).

The **Brent Goose** flock in the Cley/Blakeney (Norfolk) area contained one of the Pacific race *nigricans* known as Black Brant, and, from 10th to 15th, a **Red-breasted Goose** *B. ruficollis*. The individual on the Isle of Grain (Kent) remained for most of the month, and probably moved to Mersea Island (Essex) where one appeared from 28th, with another at Pagham. After a run of lean winters for this delightful little goose, presumably the same two or three individuals are now returning annually.

Noteworthy ducks were few. Two **Ring-necked Ducks** *Aythya collaris* remained at Drift Reservoir (Cornwall), with another at Ash Vale Gravel Pit (Hampshire), and

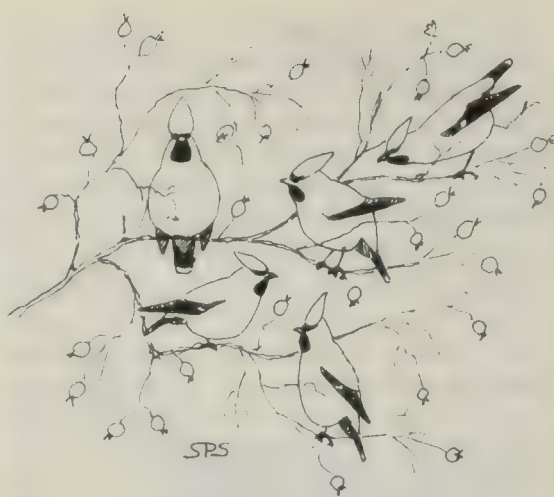




**American Wigeons** *Anas americana* remained on Guernsey (Channel Islands), with two at Theale (Berkshire) to at least mid month. A **Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina* on Loch of Harray (Orkney) was only the second record for the islands, and must be the bird seen there last winter, while a female **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* was at Blunham (Bedfordshire) from 12th for about a week. The first decent flood on the Nene Washes for three winters attracted 1,000 **Pintails** *Anas acuta*. Small numbers of **Smews** *Mergus albellus* appeared at their favourite waters, with 13 on Rutland Water (Leicestershire), ten at Wraysbury Gravel Pits (Berkshire) and seven at Dungeness. Unusual inland were single **Eiders** *Somateria mollissima* on Dowdeswell Reservoir, Cheltenham (Gloucestershire), from 28th December, on Queen Mother Reservoir (Berkshire) from early November to the end of December, and (the same bird?) on Wraysbury Gravel Pits on 12th, while a **Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca* at Lidlinton (Bedfordshire) from 24th December into January was only the third county record. Two of this last species off the Donegal coast were as unusual there as the two drake **Surf Scoters** *M. perspicillata* which they accompanied. The only other Surf Scoter reported was also a drake, at Llandulas (Clwyd) from December through January. The sea off Girdleness (Aberdeen) held 395 **Goldeneyes** *Bucephala clangula* on 12th and there were at least two drake **King Eiders** *S. spectabilis* back at Loch Fleet (Highland).

### Waxwings and others

Although the hoped-for **Waxwing** *Bombycilla garrulus* invasion has not materialised, this winter has nevertheless proved better than most recent winters to catch up with these beautiful visitors. Individuals have been scattered widely from Shetland down to Bude (Cornwall), the largest flock being 26 at Guisborough (Cleveland) at the end of the month. Of interest were two individuals at Hunstanton (Norfolk) around 11th, which declined to one on 14th, when one turned up outside Peterborough (Cambridgeshire) swimming pool, then to zero on 16th when a second arrived in Peterborough, both departing on 17th. The same two individuals appear to have been involved, but how they joined up again, over 40 miles as the Waxwing flies, must remain one of those mysteries that makes birdwatching such a fascinating pursuit.



An **Arctic Redpoll** *Carduelis hornemanni* at Filey (North Yorkshire) from 29th December to 4th was trapped on 2nd, and a single was reported at Winterton (Norfolk) on 26th. Half-a-dozen **Parrot Crossbills** *Loxia pytyopsittacus* were at Wolferton (Norfolk) in the latter part of the month, and the Carron Valley (Central) **Two-barred Crossbill** *L. leucoptera* remained into 1986. Some of the large numbers of **Siskins** *C. spinus*, evident in Britain in the autumn, had moved on west and flocks of over 300 birds were reported from Northern Ireland, whilst they were also unusually widespread in the Republic. An enormous flock of 1,000 **Snow Buntings** *Plectrophenax nivalis* on Lough Foyle (Co. Londonderry) in late January was unprecedented there, though numbers elsewhere were unexceptional apart from 200 at Fitful Head (Shetland) on 2nd; four spent the month at Crosby (Merseyside), and two remained at Queen Mother Reservoir. **Shore Larks** *Eremophila alpestris* seem to have become very scarce in the last few winters, so one at The Needles (Isle of Wight) on 24th was a welcome find. One or two **Serins** *Serinus serinus* occasionally winter: one on Exminster Marshes (Devon) on 2nd may well have been a local bird, but another at Redcar (Cleveland) throughout the month was unusually far north.

Small numbers of **Rough-legged Buzzards** *Buteo lagopus* were wintering in Yorkshire and East Anglia, and an adult **Red Kite** *Milvus milvus* at Balcaster (Co. Antrim) from 10th was a rare visitor to Ireland.

Finally, to remind us of summer, comes news of a **Hoopoe** *Upupa epops* on the Isle of Grain, a **Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* at Land's End (Cornwall), and a **Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca* pretending to be a Blackcap *S. atricapilla* on a Paignton (Devon) birdtable.



117 & 118. Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea*, Cleveland, February 1986 (Steve Young)

119. Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*, with Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus*, Tyne & Wear, February 1986 (Steve Young)



120. Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, Somerset, January 1986 (Tony Croucher)





### Latest news

Early March was very quiet, with **Waxwings** at Lowestoft (Suffolk) and Bexley Heath (Kent), two **Pomarine Skuas** at Erith (London), **Bonaparte's Gull** *Larus philadelphia* in

Cornwall, and nine **Smews** at Little Paxton. The only summer migrants reported by 11th were a **Garganey** *Anas querquedula* at Cley and a **Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* at Theale.

## Review

**The Birds of Australia: a book of identification. By Ken Simpson and Nicolas Day.** Croom Helm, London, 1985. 352 pages; 128 colour plates; many line-drawings. £25.00.

Until the publication of this book, visitors to Australia had the choice of two modern field guides: Slater's two-volume *A Field Guide to Australian Birds* and Pizzey's *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*. The choice has now risen to three, and it therefore seems worth considering the merits of the new volume in comparison with the earlier ones. The first major difference is the size of the new book, which is a little larger than volume one of *BWP* and almost as thick! This alone may put many people off using it in the field, but if so this will be to their great loss. During a recent six-week trip to Australia, I used it in the field every day, carrying it around in a small shoulder bag and found it no problem at all. (In fact, it helped to balance the telescope and tripod hanging from my other shoulder!)

The book is divided into two main sections, entitled 'Field Information' and 'The Handbook'. The former is comprised of the 128 colour plates, illustrating all the species on the Australian list (even the 'mythical' Cox's Sandpiper) and an accompanying page of text for each plate. The Handbook's 70 pages include a brief introduction to birds and Australian habitats followed by accounts of each bird family represented in Australia. For the visiting birdwatcher, the real value of any identification guide lies in its plates. Both of the earlier guides contained a number of black-and-white plates, which I believe is a bad feature in any identification guide. All of the plates in the new guide are in colour, as are many smaller illustrations used in the book's first 15 pages. Most of the illustrations in Slater's two volumes are quite pleasing (especially the passerines, which are all in colour) and are certainly perfectly adequate for most identification purposes. While the non-passerines in Pizzey's guide are portrayed quite well, I find most of the passerines less convincing, especially as many of them are shown in rather horizontal skin-like poses that fail to give any idea of the species' jizz. Nicolas Day's illustrations, on the other hand, are to my eye quite excellent. The book's format and the large number of plates have allowed him to give us large illustrations of each bird (most are 8-10 cm, making some of the smaller passerines almost life-sized) with great feather detail. The shapes and poses of his birds are all very life-like, strongly suggesting that he knows many of these birds in the field, and he has illustrated sexual differences as well as breeding and non-breeding plumages where appropriate and even juvenile plumages in some groups such as waders, gulls and terns.

The page opposite each plate contains a short description of each species and its habitat, a distribution map and, usually, a line-drawing illustrating further identification points. Where the page covers a number of species, the text is inevitably rather short and compares poorly with that in Slater and, especially, Pizzey, which contains a wealth of information. I assume that a desire to rectify this led to the family accounts in the 'Handbook' section which vary from a three-line paragraph on darters to 3½ pages on honeyeaters. I certainly found these accounts interesting background reading and often referred to them in the evening, especially when I had seen a species belonging to a new and unfamiliar family. I still, however, found need to refer to the more detailed accounts in Pizzey from time to time and believe that shortage of text is the new book's weakest point. I could find very few errors, and the only one worth mentioning is that the line-drawings of the heads of Cape Petrel and Snow Petrel have obviously been transposed.

I thoroughly recommend this book to anyone planning to visit Australia and would encourage those normally put off by bulky books seriously to consider taking a copy with them, even if they can't cope with carrying it around in the field. This is an accurate and beautiful guide to the splendid birds of a fantastic continent.

DAVID FISHER

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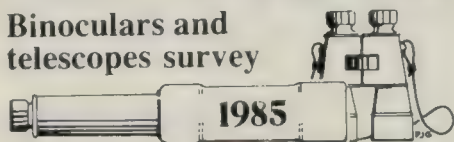
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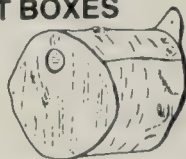
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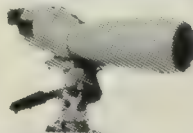
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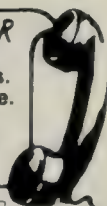
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Volume 79 Number 5 May 1986



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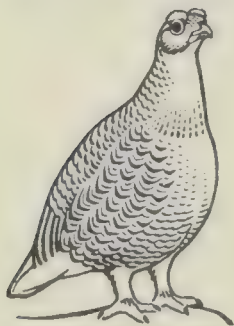
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*Publishing Manager,  
Production & Promotion*  
**Dr J. T. R. Sharrock**  
*Circulation Manager*  
**Erika Sharrock**  
*Design*  
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## Addresses

Please keep correspondence on different items separate. Please address your envelope correctly. Please supply SAE, if reply required.

*Papers, notes, letters, drawings & photographs for publication* **Dr J. T. R. Sharrock**, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK43NJ

*Subscriptions and orders for back copies* **Mrs Erika Sharrock**, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK43NJ

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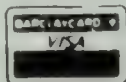
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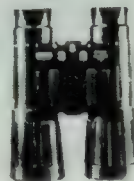
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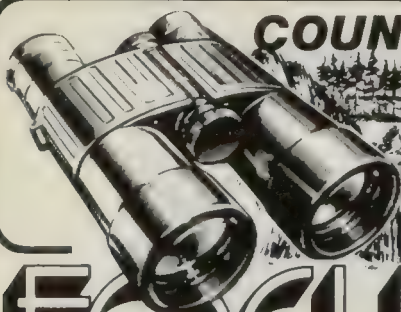
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## White-crowned Black Wheatear: new to Britain and Ireland

*B. J. Brown*

**A**t about 18.15 GMT on 4th June 1982, A. C. Easton and R. Conner were told by Mr and Mrs R. Tarry of Kessingland, Suffolk, that they had seen what they thought was possibly a Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura* to the north of the pumping station at Kessingland. Their description was good, so ACE telephoned me and we went to investigate.

The bird was easily found, in the exact spot that Mr Tarry had described. It was quite approachable, and we instantly identified it (at that time) as a Black Wheatear. Since it was all-black, with a white rump, uppertail- and undertail-coverts, and a white tail except for black central feathers, we did not consider the possibility that any other species could be involved or needed to be eliminated. We had, however, noted a single white feather on the forehead; and that the white on the outer tail feathers extended to the tip with, apart from one or two small marks, no terminal black band.

The wheatear was frequenting a small pit which was being used to dump farm rubbish and pieces of disused machinery, and a flat grassy area around this. While we were watching it, a gentleman on holiday at Kessingland came along and told us that he had observed the bird for the past two days; he had no idea what it was, believing it to be a freak Wheatear *O. oenanthe*. The supervisor of the nearby pumping station confirmed that it had been there for a few days before it was reported.



After we had watched the wheatear for about an hour, we went off to spread the news. When we arrived at my home, we checked our notes against various books. It was then that we realised that our initial identification was wrong. Looking at the illustration in Heinzel *et al.* (1972), we concluded that our bird must be a White-crowned Black Wheatear *O. leucopyga*. This is the only species which has a combination of all-black body (in non white-crowned specimens) and all-white sides to the tail. The single white feather on the forehead of our bird then became much more significant.

The wheatear was watched by a large number of people on 5th, but as many more missed out on 6th, by which time it had disappeared. This was the first record of White-crowned Black Wheatear in Britain and Ireland, and the species' most northerly occurrence by around 1,700 km.

## Description

**HEAD** Black, more or less tinged brownish, except for one white feather just right of centre on forehead.

**BODY** Rump, lower back, uppertail- and undertail-coverts, vent and rear flank white, this extending well up back and much farther than I have seen in photographs of Black Wheatear (e.g. plate 67 in Ferguson-Lees 1960); at times, the white showed in rough T shape between tertials when wings folded. Rest of body black, more or less tinged brownish, with no noticeable bluish gloss; black appeared to extend back to just between legs.

**TAIL** White, except for central feathers which were black. All outer feathers unmarked, apart from one on right-hand side which had small black mark at tip. Underside of each feather appeared to have small dark marks at tip, but only fleeting glimpses obtained, so accurate description cannot be given.

**WINGS** Blackish-brown and paler than rest of body, looking reminiscent of Ring Ouzel

*Turdus torquatus* at a distance. Coverts sooty-brown, edged slightly paler brown, but this noticeable only at close range; primaries sooty-brown, perhaps slightly paler than coverts; secondaries appeared to be a bit darker than primaries, but this difficult to confirm.

**BARE PARTS** Eye black. Bill and legs black, but appearing quite grey in some lights.

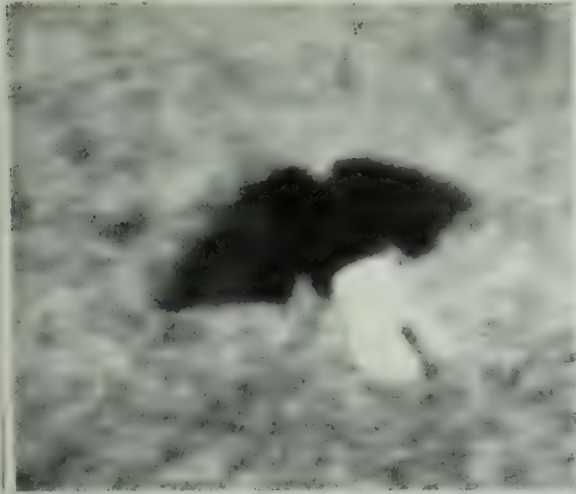
**SIZE AND SHAPE** No direct comparison with any other species, but appeared to be slightly larger than Wheatear. Shape and stance as in typical Wheatear, but appeared quite pot-bellied at times.

**BEHAVIOUR** Similar to Wheatear. When we watched at close range during first evening, flicked wings quite often and 'waved' tail up and down slowly. This behaviour not seen on following day (perhaps anxiety reaction to my close approach on previous evening).

**AGE AND SEX** Probably first-summer (see discussion below).

Peter Clement has commented (*in litt.*) that 'the bird was most likely to have been of the nominate race *O. l. leucopyga*, from North Africa, on tail pattern. The state of plumage does not help subspecific identification and only measurements in the hand would have confirmed. Many birds from Egypt and Sinai are intermediate between the two races.'

The wheatear stayed in the vicinity of the small pit and the surrounding area of flat stony ground, which was covered to a varying extent with short grass and dune-type flora. The pit was being gradually infilled with farm rubbish, including pieces of concrete, metal, wood, tyres, bricks, a trailer, and soil which was being dumped on the afternoon of 5th and which may have been the cause of the bird's departure. The vegetation in the pit was much lusher than in the surrounding area and the bird obtained much of its food there. It was seen to feed mainly on brownish and greenish



**121 & 122.** White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*, Suffolk, June 1982, showing rump and tail pattern (left, B. J. Brown; right, M. A. Harding)



**123 & 124.** White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*, Suffolk, June 1982, showing stance and extent of white on underparts (John Hewitt)

**125 & 126.** White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*, Suffolk, June 1982 (below, M. A. Harding; right, Mike Frost)







Fig. 1. White-crowned Black Wheatear  
*Oenanthe leucopyga*, Suffolk, June 1982  
(M. P. Frost)

caterpillars, which it persistently bashed and squeezed before swallowing. Other observers reported seeing it eating earthworms.

### Weather, and occurrence of associated species

The weather during May and June 1982 was abnormally dry and sunny. According to Blowers (1983), only small amounts of rain fell between 7th and 27th May, and in a warm southwesterly airflow temperatures soared to 75°F (24°C) on 16th. The temperatures in the first week of June were the hottest for 35 years, and a very warm air-stream originating from North Africa and the Mediterranean raised temperatures to over 80°F (27°C) in Suffolk.

There seems little doubt that this weather pattern was the cause of the vagrancy of the White-crowned Black Wheatear. A number of other southern species occurred in Britain at the time, but the Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda* at Langsett, South Yorkshire, from 15th May (Lunn 1985) is most significant: it could have come from the same area, on the same air-stream. It is quite possible that our bird had been at Kessingland for up to a couple of weeks, as the spot is virtually unwatched, particularly in summer; most birders visiting Benacre, to the south, stop short of the pumping station. It may seem amazing that two unexpected 'firsts' should have arrived in Britain at the same time, but the possibility was foreseen (Sharrock 1982): 'One year, perhaps, we shall get whatever weather pattern is needed to bring rarities such as Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes* pouring northwards to us from the deserts of North Africa.'

### Identification and ageing of White-crowned Black Wheatear

When identifying a wheatear with an all-black body, there are three species that need to be considered: Black, White-crowned Black, and Eastern Pied *O. picata* of the race *opistholeuca*. It is not intended to discuss the finer details of identification of all three species here: a paper on wheatear identification is to appear in a forthcoming issue of this journal, and I am grateful to P. Clement and Dr L. Cornwallis for letting me see a draft copy of the relevant parts of the paper, upon which the following notes on the main points separating Black and White-crowned Black Wheatears are based.

Any wheatear with an all-black body and white crown and tail (except for central feathers) is instantly identifiable as White-crowned Black. The situation is somewhat different where immatures and non white-crowned adults are concerned, and it is then necessary to see the tail to be certain of identity: on Black, this has a broad terminal band similar to that of Wheatear; this band is lacking on White-crowned Black, which has the outer feathers completely white with or without a variable amount of small black markings at the tips. Other points on White-crowned Black are the extension of white above the rump onto the lower back, and onto the ventral area below. These lesser, but valid, characters are useful only when used in conjunction with the tail pattern, but could conceivably eliminate confusion with a Black Wheatear showing an abnormal, damaged or badly worn tail (the tips of the Kessingland wheatear's tail feathers looked dark when wetted by dew from the grass early in the morning). I have not found any mention of the amount of white on the rump and lower back in the dozen or so books that I have been able to consult, but some do illustrate it (especially Etchécopar & Hüe 1967 and Heinzel *et al.* 1972) while others do not (e.g. Gallagher & Woodcock 1980). The Greek *leucopyga* (white rump) and the species' old name of White-rumped Black Chat do seem to imply that the amount of white in that area is significant. This is, in fact, diagnostic in the case of White-crowned Black and Black. The amount of white on the rump is, however, exceeded by Hooded Wheatear *O. monacha* and equalled by Hume's Wheatear *O. alboniger*, but as both of these have predominantly white underparts no confusion between them and the species under discussion exists.

In the past, there has been great confusion, and speculation, as to what the presence or absence of a white crown indicates. Individuals are found with all-white or all-black crowns, or any mixture between the two. Some authors have stated that this is related to age and/or sex, or even race, but breeding pairs occur in which either one or both of the sexes show a black or a white crown.

Any individual with a white crown is certainly adult, but those with black crowns may be adults or first-years. To determine which, one has to look for the bluish gloss (or lack of it) on the black parts of the plumage. On adults, all the black areas are glossy, but this gloss is usually confined to the breast, mantle and coverts on first-years. In worn plumage, first-years also look more sooty-brown above, and then show a greater resemblance in this respect to Black Wheatear. All wheatears retain juvenile primaries, secondaries, tail feathers and some wing-coverts throughout their first year, until the first complete moult which takes place in the autumn of their second calendar-year. The faded, brownish coloration of the Kessingland bird's wings (contrastingly paler than the rest of the body), as well as the lack of any bluish gloss on the body, strongly suggest that it was a first-summer individual. In June, it seems likely that the wings of an adult would not be so faded and contrastingly pale, and that the body would have been more glossy, bluish-black.

White-crowned Black Wheatear is noticeably larger than Wheatear, and only slightly smaller than Black Wheatear, which is the biggest of all



wheatears. Such a small difference in size would, however, be of little use in the field unless White-crowned Black and Black were seen together.

### Distribution and habitat

There has been, and in some respects still is, a lack of knowledge of the exact distribution of the White-crowned Black Wheatear, with some authors contradicting others. The following account has been compiled from Harrison (1982), Jennings (1981), Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1957) and Vaurie (1959).

In North Africa, the species ranges from the Western Sahara in the west to Sinai and the Red Sea coast in the east. It does not quite reach the Mediterranean coast in the north. The southern limit is difficult to identify, but the species is certainly found around the oases of the southern Sahara. In the east, it occurs south to central Ethiopia and the northern tip of Somalia. There is a patchy distribution across Saudi Arabia north to Israel, Jordan and Iran.

Within this range, the White-crowned Black Wheatear frequents the most inhospitable areas. To quote Harrison (1982), it is 'resident in dry subtropical zones. It occurs in desert areas of very sparse herbage, where broken terrain occurs, on rocky outcrops, talus slopes, and in wadis and hill ravines. It also uses ruins and buildings and occurs in desert villages.' Where it nests near human habitation, it is said to be very tame and confiding.

The species winters within its breeding range, and is 'mostly sedentary' (Gallagher & Woodcock 1980). Could this last statement indicate that some movement occurs? There are very few cases of vagrancy: records of individuals in Malta on 18th April 1872 (Sultana & Gauci 1982), in Cyprus on 17th March 1970 (Bannerman & Bannerman 1971; the bird was actually present from 11th to 24th), and of two at the Reserva Biologica de Doñana, Spain, on 28th May 1977 (Valverde 1978) are the only ones known. I would suspect, however, that black-crowned individuals of White-crowned Black Wheatear might have been misidentified as Black Wheatear in south European areas where the latter species is more familiar. The Kessingland bird could easily have been accepted as a Black Wheatear had we not seen the tail. A 'Black Wheatear' in Ireland in June 1964 is on record with the proviso that White-crowned Black was not eliminated (*Irish Bird Report* 12: 32).

### Subspecies

Two subspecies of White-crowned Black Wheatear are recognised by most authors. That found in Sinai, southern Israel and southern Jordan, *O. l. ernesti*, is distinctly bluer-black, and some individuals have more black on the tips of the tail feathers; in the hand, its bill is slightly longer than on nominate *leucopyga*. The nominate race occurs across the rest of the range, but some authorities split this in two, assigning the North African population to the race *aegra*. Wardlaw-Ramsey (1923) described *aegra* as having a slightly smaller bill and, judging from the measurements given, a marginally, but not diagnostically, shorter wing. Meinertzhagen (1954) doubted

the validity of this subspecies, describing it as a synonym of *leucopyga*, and it was not mentioned by Vaurie (1959), but Howard & Moore (1980) included it in their checklist.

## Acknowledgments

I am indebted to Peter Clement for letting me see a draft of his forthcoming paper, and for reading and commenting on the present paper; without this, the identification section would have been greatly curtailed. I also thank Peter Grant for commenting on an earlier draft, and the editor of the *East Anglian Daily Times* for allowing me to quote from their weather review.

## Summary

A White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga* was present at Kessingland, Suffolk, on 4th and 5th June 1982, and almost certainly for a few days previously. This was the first record of this mainly sedentary African and Middle Eastern species for Britain and Ireland; it was probably a first-summer individual and probably of the nominate race. The species' natural distribution and habitat are summarised and its identification and ageing discussed.

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# Snowy Owls on Fetlar



*Martin Robinson and C. Dustin Becker*

**T**he Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* was first recorded breeding in Britain in 1967, on Fetlar, Shetland (Tulloch 1968), although it may have nested in the past on other remote Shetland islands (Saxby 1874). The RSPB set up a reserve around the nesting area, and, with the co-operation of the landowner and crofters, kept an around-the-clock watch next to the owls' nest. This paper summarises events during the breeding seasons 1967-75, since when no breeding has been recorded.

## Methods

Each year, an observation hide was erected about 100 m from the nest such that one could approach it unseen by the birds on the nest. At the hide, wardens recorded and timed owl movements and behaviour, and, where possible, the identity of prey brought to the nest. Observations were noted in a standard way by 30 main recorders and many other short-term helpers. In 1975, within the owls' 4-km<sup>2</sup> hunting range, waders were counted and their available chicks thereby estimated.

## Results

It is believed, from plumage details, that the same pair of owls nested from 1967 to 1974. In 1973 and 1974, the male was bigamous: two females laid eggs and began to incubate; the male supplied his original mate with food, but did not provide for the second female, a younger individual ringed and raised on Fetlar and probably related to the main pair. In 1975, this second female mated with the male at the main nest and reared four chicks. During winter 1975/76, the male disappeared, and breeding came to an end.

During the nine-year study, the population of rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* changed markedly. Myxomatosis was introduced in 1970, and by 1971 rabbits had almost disappeared from the island, and from the owls' diet. In 1974, there were signs of a recovery in the rabbit population, and by 1975 the percentage of rabbits in the owls' prey was near the levels preceding the epidemic (1968-70).

*Breeding biology*

The breeding performance of Snowy Owls on Fetlar during 1967-75 is summarised in table 1.

**Table 1. Breeding success of Snowy Owls *Nyctea scandiaca* on Fetlar, Shetland, 1967-75, related to size of population of rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus***

Year	Estimated rabbit numbers	laid	EGGS	YOUNG	
			hatched	fledged	Survived to first winter
MAIN NEST					
1967	high	7	6	5	5
1968	high	6	6	3	3
1969	high	6	4	3	1
1970	declining	5	5	2	2
1971	low	5	5	3	3
1972	low	4	4	0	0
1973	low	5	5	2	1
1974	low	5	5	1	1
1975	increasing	6	4	4	4
SECOND NEST					
1973	low	3	0	—	—
1974	low	1	0	—	—
1975	increasing	3	0	—	—

**CLUTCH SIZE**

The mean clutch size for the main nest over the nine breeding seasons was 5.4 eggs. It was higher in the three years when rabbits were most abundant (1967-69) than in the four years when they were low in numbers.

**EGG-LAYING AND INCUBATION**

All the first laying dates fell within a week of 16th May (see Appendix 1), the exceptional date of the colonising pair in 1967 being ten days later than any others. Few nest checks were made in the earlier years, when the priority was to protect a rare bird. In 1970, more frequent checks showed a minimum of 201 hours between laying of the first and last eggs, and a mean of 50 hours between each egg. Egg-laying was evenly spaced. In 1968, there was an interval of five days between the third and fourth eggs, coinciding with very cold northeasterly winds (Tulloch 1969).

**INCUBATION AND HATCHING**

The female started to incubate the first egg as soon as it was laid. In nine years, the mean length of incubation of the first egg was 31.6 days, although the data suggest 32 days or slightly more for later eggs. This compares well with the 32-33 days given elsewhere (Watson 1957; Scherzinger 1974; Taylor 1974).

Of the 49 eggs laid by the main pair, 44 hatched. Hatching success did not vary with food supply; it probably depended more on other factors, such as care during incubation and the amount of disturbance to the female on the nest. On one occasion, in 1975, the female flew with an egg (possibly damaged or infertile) in her bill to the opposite side of the nesting valley, smashed it open with a downward blow of her bill, and ate the contents.





127. Nesting habitat of Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* in Shetland: female at nest with four young, July 1975 (Chris Mylne)

During the nine years, three other eggs disappeared around the time that they should have been hatching.

Mean date for first hatching was 16th June. All first hatches occurred within a week of this, apart from in 1967, when the first egg did not hatch until 4th July (see Appendix 1).

#### FLEDGING SUCCESS AND DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG

From the 44 eggs that hatched, 23 young fledged (average 2.5 per pair per year). Twelve of the remaining 21 young died in the first ten days of life, and five more died before leaving the nest. At least three of the fledged young were known to have died in their first three weeks out of the nest. More young fledged in years when rabbits were abundant than in years when their food was predominantly wader chicks (table 1).

From about 16 days of age, owlets began to wander a metre or so from the nest. These excursions gradually became longer and wider-ranging, though the young owls would still return to the nest to be fed. We could not establish the precise age at which each young finally abandoned the nest. Excluding 1973, the mean age for the oldest owlet to leave the nest for good was  $26.2 \pm 3.4$  days. In 1973, the two oldest young were still returning to the nest at 39 and 38 days respectively, attracted there by the female, who was feeding a weak chick. As young abandoned the nest and fed away from it, the interval between successive owlets leaving seemed to narrow, but data on this are insufficient for conclusions to be drawn.

After leaving the nest, the young owls hid among rocks and continued to be fed by the female. The first flights of the oldest young occurred from 22nd July to 16th August (mean 31st July), except in 1967 when the breeding cycle was later. The average age for first flights was 45 days (range 43-50).



Other authors give a slightly longer period: Watson (1957) noted that Snowy Owls were unable to fly strongly until over 50 days old, and Witherby *et al.* (1938) stated that young in captivity began to fly at 51 to 57 days. The Fetlar owls did not have mastery of the air at 45 days, but they were flying buoyantly then and not simply gliding downhill.

### Feeding ecology

#### HUNTING BEHAVIOUR

The owls hunted almost entirely by a sit-and-watch technique. They were seen quartering the ground and hovering (Watson 1957) only occasionally.

Time spent hunting could not be separated from time spent guarding the nest, because the male did both at once. The male could locate prey from his favourite perches overlooking the nesting valley. Fourteen times during 1973-75 he flew to the slopes of a hill in his main hunting area, dropped on to prey and returned with it to the nest. The mean duration of these forays was four minutes. On discovering a brood of wader chicks, he often brought them back one by one, frequently mobbed by waders nesting nearby.

The female was observed making forays to a hunting area about 700 m from the nest, and used the same hunting methods as the male. In 1973, the second female left the nest to kill an Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* which had landed to feed within 20 m of her. Passerines, such as Wheatears *Oenanthe oenanthe* and Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis*, near the nest were always ignored by the incubating female.

In 1975, the female joined in hunting about the time that the young finally abandoned the nest. She brought in only 21% of the food items

128. Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* nest with seven eggs, Shetland, June/July 1967 (Bobby Tulloch)

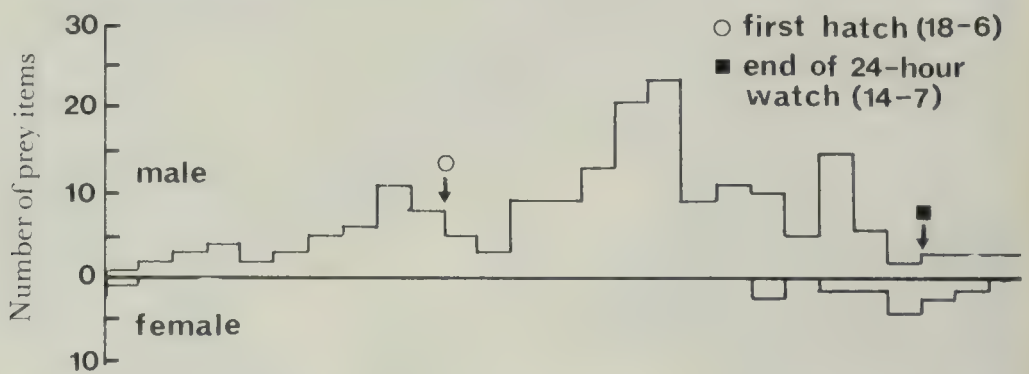






129. Male Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* alighting at nest with young, Shetland, July 1967 (Eric & David Hosking)

between then and the end of regular observations, which ceased when all four young had flown. Fig. 1 shows the number of prey items delivered to the nest every three days. Both female and young relied heavily on the male for food during the early stages. The female did not hunt much for food for her offspring until they were more than one month old.



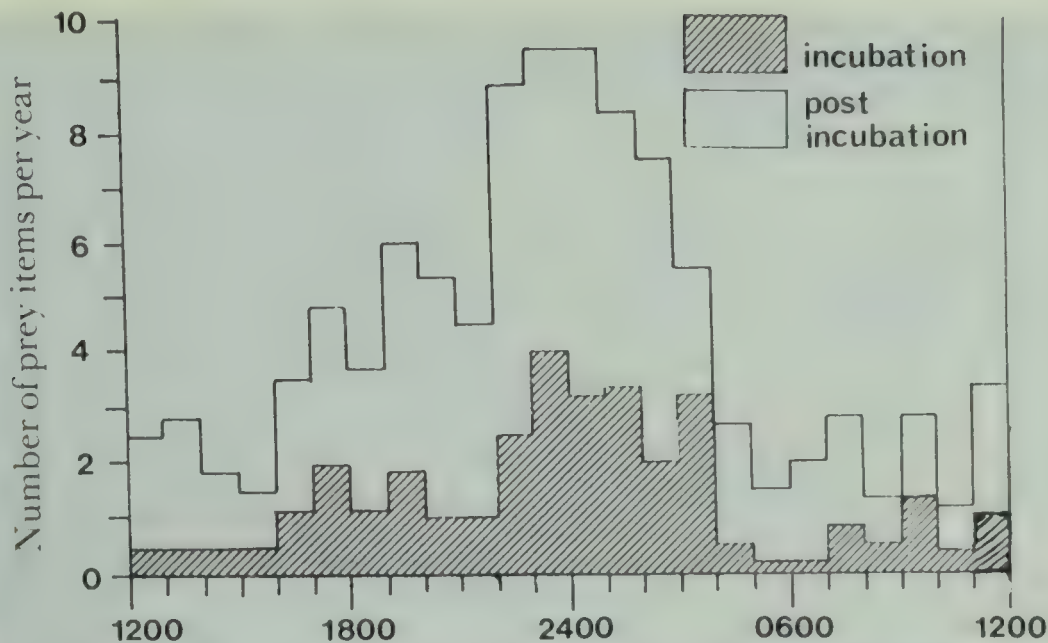


Fig. 2. Number of prey items brought to nest each hour by Snowy Owls *Nyctea scandiaca* over six seasons (286 days), Fetlar, Shetland

In the post-incubation period, the male delivered an average of 0.13 prey items per hour to the nest, as against 0.06 items per hour while the female was incubating. Thus, to supply both female and chicks, the male doubled the number of prey items that he delivered.

FEEDING AND FOOD DEPOSITS

Prey caught by the male was delivered, sometimes headless, to the female at the nest. She then either took it to a feeding station to eat or stored it at a

130. Female Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* with young, Shetland, July 1967 (Eric & David Hosking)





food depot. When there were young in the nest, she would eat bits herself at the same time as feeding them. Surplus food was still removed to a depot.

The male was never seen to tear up prey and feed the young. The female did all of this at the nest soon after the male brought it in. In the later stages, when the young had fledged and scattered, the male would pass whole prey items to them. The male and female of a captive pair took an equal share in feeding the young after they had left the nest (Scherzinger 1974), but this was not the case with the wild Shetland pair.

#### PREY

On Fetlar, where there are no lemmings *Lemmus* or voles (Microtinae), rabbits were the preferred prey. Wood mice *Apodemus sylvaticus* were only occasionally brought to the nest, but they probably formed a larger proportion of the food in winter, when the owls sometimes hunted on lower ground around the crofts.

Several waders, mainly Oystercatchers, Curlews *Numenius arquata* and Whimbrels *N. phaeopus*, nested within the owls' hunting range and were taken. Arctic Skuas *Stercorarius parasiticus* nested nearby, and in the earlier years were caught as fledglings or adults from August onwards; during 1972-75, however, nestlings were taken throughout July, and in 1975 formed 22% of the diet in the first three weeks of that month. Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* were taken occasionally in most years, usually as young on the wing. Chicks of Common Gulls *Larus canus* and of Great Black-backed Gulls *L. marinus* were also occasionally taken. A total of 20 bird species was recorded as prey. The owls preyed on most of the bird species that bred on the hill around them, but showed preferences.

In 1968, before the myxomatosis epidemic, prey brought to the nest

**131.** Female Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* in threat/distraction display, Shetland, summer 1967  
(Bobby Tulloch)





132. Female Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* feeding pellet to one of her young, Shetland, July 1967  
(Eric & David Hosking)

consisted exclusively of rabbits and two adult Oystercatchers until the second half of July, when Oystercatcher chicks were more extensively taken (fig. 3). In 1972 and 1974, after the epidemic, rabbits were almost absent from the diet, and the owls relied heavily on waders, Arctic Skuas and other birds. In 1975, rabbits once again made up a large part of the food supplied to the nest during incubation and the owlets' early stages; during July, however, although available, they were ignored in favour of wader chicks, which were then abundant.

The biomass of prey items was estimated using averages from other studies (Appendix 2), and these figures were multiplied by the number of relevant prey items brought to the nest every three days. The errors inherent in assigning weights to prey items, rather than weighing each item, could easily result in unrealistic figures. The biomass calculations in this

Table 2. Estimated weight (g) of food brought to nest for female Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* and chicks, Fetlar, Shetland

	Data based on 24-hour watches			
	1968	1972	1974	1975
No. days data collected	66	36	33	57
Total weight of food estimated	37,700	11,800	19,300	34,100
Weight per day	572	328	585	598
Weight per day during incubation period	314	241	390	404
Weight per day after hatching	719	587	726	812



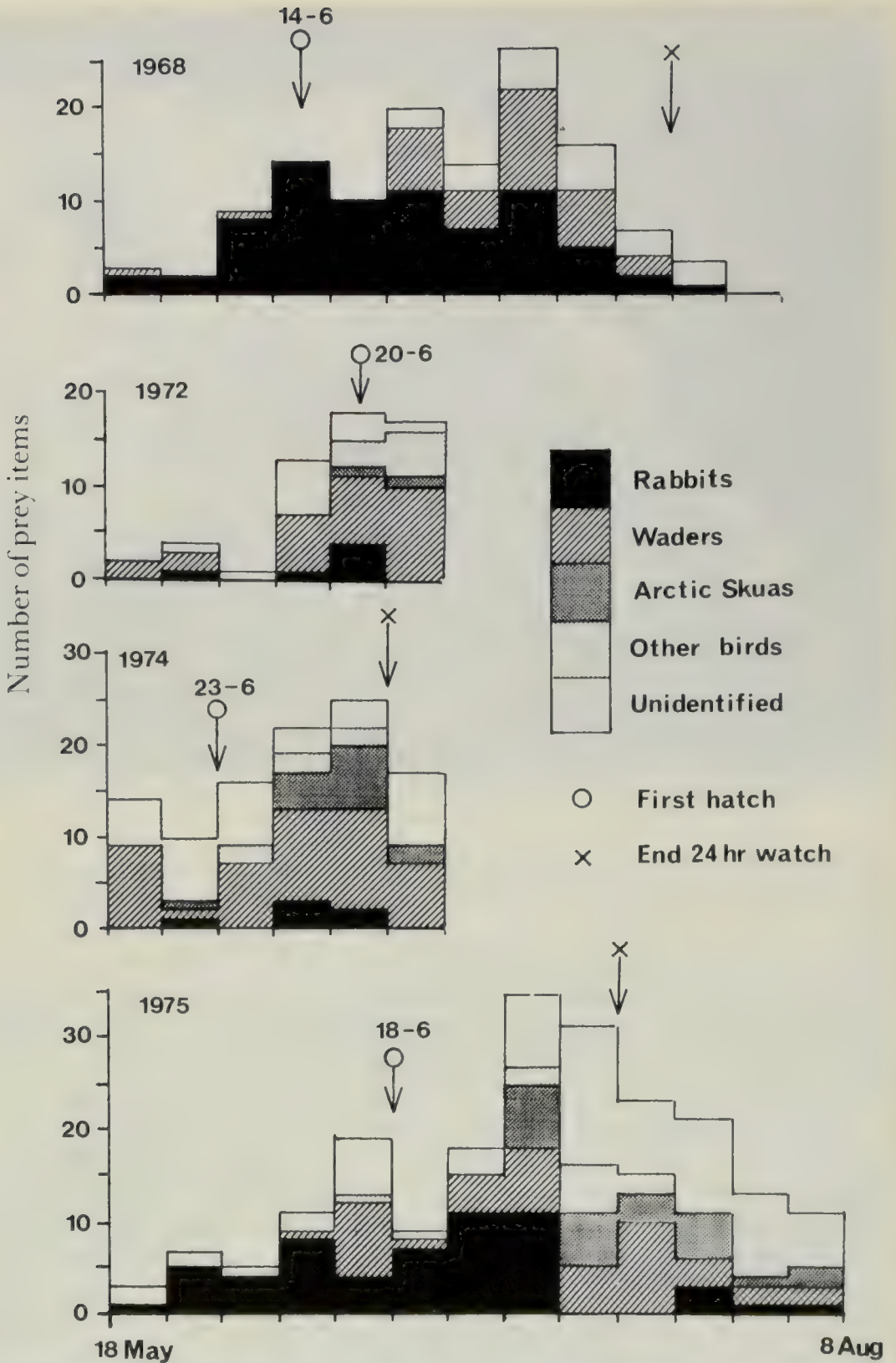


Fig. 3. Profiles of prey brought to nest by Snowy Owls *Nyctea scandiaca*, Fetlar, Shetland, in 1968, 1972, 1974 and 1975. Six days per interval

study should, however, be reliable for relative comparisons. The estimates presented in table 2 were based on data collected during 24-hour watches. In 1972, the biomass of prey brought to the nest was probably lower than in the years when rabbits made up a large percentage of prey.



1133. Female Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* at nest with young, Shetland, July 1967 (Eric & David Hosking)

PREY AVAILABILITY

In 1975, the number of wader pairs on the island was counted. The number present in the Snowy Owls' hunting range was compared with prey actually taken (table 3). The owls took fewer chicks of Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* than expected from their availability. Whimbrel and Oystercatcher chicks were the most frequent wader prey: the owls took 22-26% of available Oystercatcher and Whimbrel chicks, but no more than 3% of chicks of all other waders combined.

Table 3. Proportion of available wader chicks taken as prey by Snowy Owls *Nyctea scandiaca* during 1975 breeding season, Fetlar, Shetland

Prey in order of availability	No. of pairs	No. of chicks	% chicks taken as prey
Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	19	57	26
Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	14	56	4
Whimbrel <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	10	40	22
Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	5	20	5
Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i>	4	16	0
Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	4	16	0





134. Male Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* calling, Shetland, July 1967 (Eric & David Hosking)

## Discussion

In Norway, Snowy Owl clutches of 10-12 eggs have been recorded in peak lemming years, but as low as 3-4 and 4-5 eggs in less favourable years (Portenko 1972). The Fetlar mean of 5.4 is towards the bottom of the range.

In Shetland, long periods of mist and rain are frequent at all seasons. This may have affected the development of the young in two ways. First, the rate of prey-delivery by the male was reduced, sometimes almost to zero; and, secondly, the cold and damp may have laid young owls open to disease. Two owlets that died after fledging in 1969 were examined by a veterinary laboratory: one was infected with pneumonia and contained *Staphylococcus* and the other harboured the fungal infection aspergillosis, both conditions indicative of damp. No post-mortem analyses were carried out on young that died at earlier stages (some young disappeared without trace and others were found half-eaten).

On several occasions, young died when there seemed to be no lack of food. In 1972, all of the four young died over a two-day period, when less than ten days old; the weather had not been unusually bad and the prey brought in should have been sufficient. On three occasions when small young died, however, the food delivered by the male had been considerably

curtailed: during one period in 1970, for example, he delivered only three items in six days. When one of the young died in the nest in 1974, the female fed it to the remaining chicks. This behaviour was suspected on several other occasions. There was no evidence that the female killed any chicks herself, but the possibility cannot be discounted.

In the Arctic, the first eggs are usually laid in May or early June, with some variation (Watson 1957). In Shetland, there is no snow cover in the spring, and the owls, in the absence of lemmings, prey on other species. The appearance of young rabbits above ground and the hatching of avian prey species may have governed the owls' laying dates in some way.

The mean hatching interval is not likely to be shorter than the mean laying interval of 50 hours. This is longer than most observers have noted (Watson 1957; Sutton & Parmelee 1956; Portenko 1972). On the Hardangervidda, Norway, at the same latitude ( $60^{\circ} 39' \text{ N}$ ) as Fetlar, Barth (in Portenko 1972) gave 44 hours: still considerably less than Fetlar's 50 hours.

The data suggest that Snowy Owls are quite adaptable in their feeding behaviour. In years when rabbits were scarce, they switched to other prey; unable to obtain an equivalent amount, however, they laid fewer eggs and reared fewer young. Hence, the Fetlar owls showed a response similar to that of other Snowy Owl populations, which depend on fluctuating populations of voles and lemmings.

**135.** Female Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* alighting at nest with young, Shetland, July 1967 (Eric & David Hosking)







136. Female Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* at nest with young, on 'a very wet day', Shetland, summer 1967 (*Dennis Coultts*)

## Conclusion

The disappearance of the male in winter 1975/76 ended breeding on Fetlar, just as the rabbit population had increased and things seemed to be going well again. The year 1975, with four young reared, had been the most successful since the very first one. In 1976, up to five females were on the island at one time, and it was hoped that a new male might arrive. Male Snowy Owls, however, have always been scarcer than females on Fetlar. None of the six males that survived up to their first winter remained on the island, or even, apparently, in Shetland. None has yet been seen since the old male's disappearance, while in most years one or two females have remained on Fetlar throughout the breeding season and have even laid eggs.

If Snowy Owls should breed again on Fetlar, it is questionable whether the rabbit population, affected as it is by myxomatosis, would remain constant enough to support them. The natural arrival of a male from elsewhere would be much welcomed, but the introduction of a captive male into a place with such an uncertain food supply would be hard to justify.

## Acknowledgments

We thank Dr Gareth Thomas for encouraging and directing this work; A. J. Prater, Dr R. W. Furness and Dr C. D. T. Minton for advice on weights; previous wardens, A. R. Mainwood and I. S. Robertson, for supplying notes; J. G. Robertson for help with analysis; H. Prendergast for carrying out the census of breeding waders; and P. Kinnear, T. Williams and Dr A. Watson for helpful comments. R. J. Tulloch set up the protection scheme and was the guiding light throughout; many of the islanders on Fetlar helped with its operation, but special

thanks are due to L. Brown of North Dale and his late wife, Jean. About 30 wardens lost a lot of sleep to collect the data. Finally, we thank the RSPB for organising the scheme and allowing time to produce this paper.

## Summary

During 1967-75, the breeding biology, feeding and behaviour of Snowy Owls *Nyctea scandiaca* on Fetlar, Shetland, were studied. Mean clutch size over the period was 5.4, being higher in years when rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* were abundant and lower in others. First laying dates fell within a week of 16th May, and the mean incubation period for the first egg was 31.6 days. Of a total of 49 eggs laid, 44 hatched and 23 young fledged (average 2.5 per pair/year); 17 young died in the nest. Fledging success was higher in years when rabbits were abundant. Average age for first flights of young was 45 days. The male supplied almost all the food in the early stages. The preferred prey was rabbits. Wader chicks were frequently taken, and in years of low rabbit numbers waders and other birds formed a major part of the diet; fewer chicks of Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* were taken than expected from their high availability, but disproportionate numbers of chicks of Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* and Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* were preyed on.



1137. Female Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* with young, Shetland, July 1967 (Eric & David Hosking)

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Martin Robinson, Balrobbie Farm, Killiecrankie, Pitlochry, Perthshire PH16 5LJ  
C. Dustin Becker, Orion Cottage, Coton Road, Grantchester, Cambridge CB3 9NX

Appendix 1. Breeding chronology of Snowy Owls *Nyctea scandiaca* on Fetlar, 1967-75

In 1975, first egg did not hatch: incubation period taken up to hatching of second egg

Year	FIRST EGG		Incubation period (days)	Date first young flying	Age (days) first young flying
	laid	hatched			
1967	2 June	4 July	33	16 August	44
1968	12 May	14 June	33	27 July	44
1969	10 May	9 June	30	22 July	44
1970	10 May	10 June	31	24 July	45
1971	13 May	14 June	32	Not known	—
1972	18 May	20 June	33	None flew	—
1973	7 May	7 June	31	26 July	50
1974	23 May	23 June	31	9 August	48
1975	14 May	18 June	36	30 July	43

Appendix 2. Estimates of prey biomass taken by Snowy Owls *Nyctea scandiaca* on Fetlar

Other prey species, less important in bulk, were similarly treated. Mean hatching dates of the various bird species were taken into account so that a prey chick was considered to have a maximum weight by a particular date

Prey species	Size	Age	Weight (g)	Source
Rabbit				
<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	small	3-6 weeks	280	M. N. Stephens (extrapolated)
	medium	6+ weeks	690	
Oystercatcher				
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	small	7 days	70	A. J. Prater (in litt.)
	medium	19 days	270	
	large	30 days	410	Mercer (1968)
	adult	—	510	
Whimbrel				
<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	small	9 days	60	A. J. Prater (in litt.)
	medium	23 days	190	
	large	35 days	290	
Arctic Skua				
<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	small	10 days	190	R. W. Furness (in litt.)
	medium	20 days	360	
	large	30 days	440	

We draw readers' attention to the correspondence, headed 'Help for the Snowy Owls?', on pages 253-258. Eds

# Mystery photographs



**113** Last month's mystery photograph, of a single white bird along a coastline (plate 112, repeated here), was taken by B. J. Hill at Eilat, Israel, in March 1985. From the bird's plumage, shape, proportions and posture, it is clearly of an egret *Egretta*. The problem is in identifying which one. The lanceolate (spear-shaped) head plumes immediately rule out Great White *E. alba* and Yellow-billed Egrets *E. intermedia*, neither of which has these. The presence of head plumes also tells us that it is an adult in breeding plumage (its back plumes, too, can just be seen). We are now left with a choice of, in the West Palearctic, Little Egret *E. garzetta* and Western Reef Heron *E. gularis*\*. Little Egret, however, always has a completely black bill, which is also somewhat thinner than our mystery bird's. So, we appear to be dealing with a Western Reef Heron, showing well its thick, particoloured bill.

This particular individual, however, does have a bill much darker than average; and apparently long, black legs with pale colour to half-way up the

---

\* The author's view is that Little Egret and Western Reef Heron are both races of the same species, *E. garzetta* (some of the reasons for this are given in Hancock & Kushlan 1984). We have here followed Voous (1977, *List of Recent Holarctic Bird Species*), according to our stated policy. Eds





139. Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis schistacea* at nest site, India, April 1985 (James Hancock)

tarsus (intimating that the feet may also be pale, not black). This suggests that gene flow between nominate Little Egret and the coastal race of Western Reef Heron *E. g. schistacea* may have occurred. The breeding season for egrets south of Eilat along the south Sinai coast starts in April; inland, breeding commences a month later. Normally we would expect the reef heron to breed southwards from Eilat and the Little Egret northwards. Little Egrets are now widespread in Israel, and dark-plumaged egrets of indeterminate background are now observed regularly on the northern fishponds, as well as in the Hula Reserve (Ashkenazi *in litt.*; personal observations) where they have bred (these may possibly be the source of some of the sightings in recent years of 'Western Reef Herons' along the north Mediterranean coast and in southern Europe: Hancock & Kushlan 1984); particoloured birds have been seen in the heronry. The possibility exists that white egrets of different 'forms' have also interbred there (these can be identified by the colour of their facial skin: Hancock 1984). B. J. Hill's photograph may, therefore, be more mysterious than at first appears.

JAMES HANCOCK

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140. Mystery photograph 114. Identify the species. Answer next month

## Product reports

Items included in this feature have been submitted by the manufacturers or their agents. The reviews are the personal opinions of the reviewers; they are not the result of technical tests, but are assessments made after use in appropriate conditions (e.g. in the field). Neither *British Birds* nor the individual reviewers can accept responsibility for any adverse consequences of opinions stated, and items are accepted for review on this understanding. We aim, however, to be helpful both to our readers and to the manufacturers of goods used by birdwatchers. Eds

### **'Elephant's Trunk'—Standard (model 112) camera case**

This is a padded, hard-wearing camcord case, capable of accepting a 35-mm camera with a lens up to about 14 cm  $\times$  8 cm diameter attached. The lid is secured by a draw-cord and a velcro fastening; a larger model (114) is required if a motor drive is attached to the camera. The review case was supplied with an adjustable belt with quick-release buckle, enabling it to be carried either around the waist or over one shoulder, bandolier fashion. I was able to use it with camera and either a 70  $\times$  210 mm zoom or a 300-mm lens; it would probably take most of the 500-mm f8 mirror-lenses that are currently on the market.

After several months of use in the field, it is as good as new, and proved more than adequate to protect its contents from accidental knocks and rain. The manufacturers, Camera Care Systems, claim that it will provide complete protection 'in even the foulest of weather'. If you need a protective case allowing instant access to camera with attached lens, then the *Elephant's Trunk*, costing about £22.00, can be strongly recommended.

R. J. CHANDLER



# PhotoSpot

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## 20. Hazel Grouse



141 & 142. Hazel Grouse *Bonasa bonasia*, France: above, female, December 1985; below, male, April 1985 (Jean-Louis Klein)



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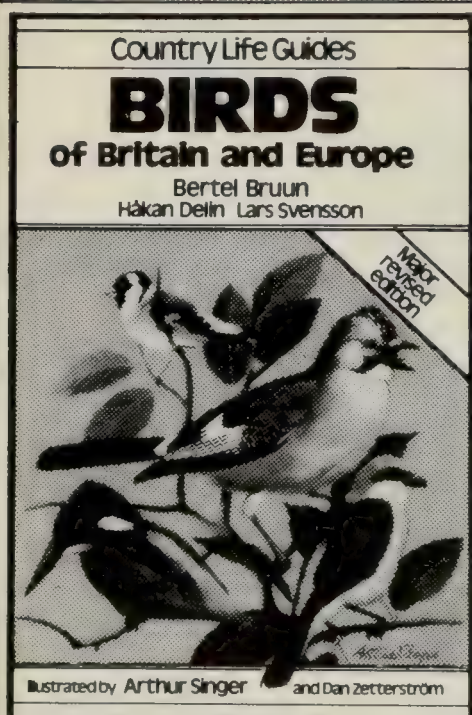
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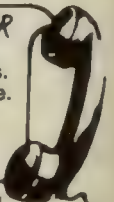
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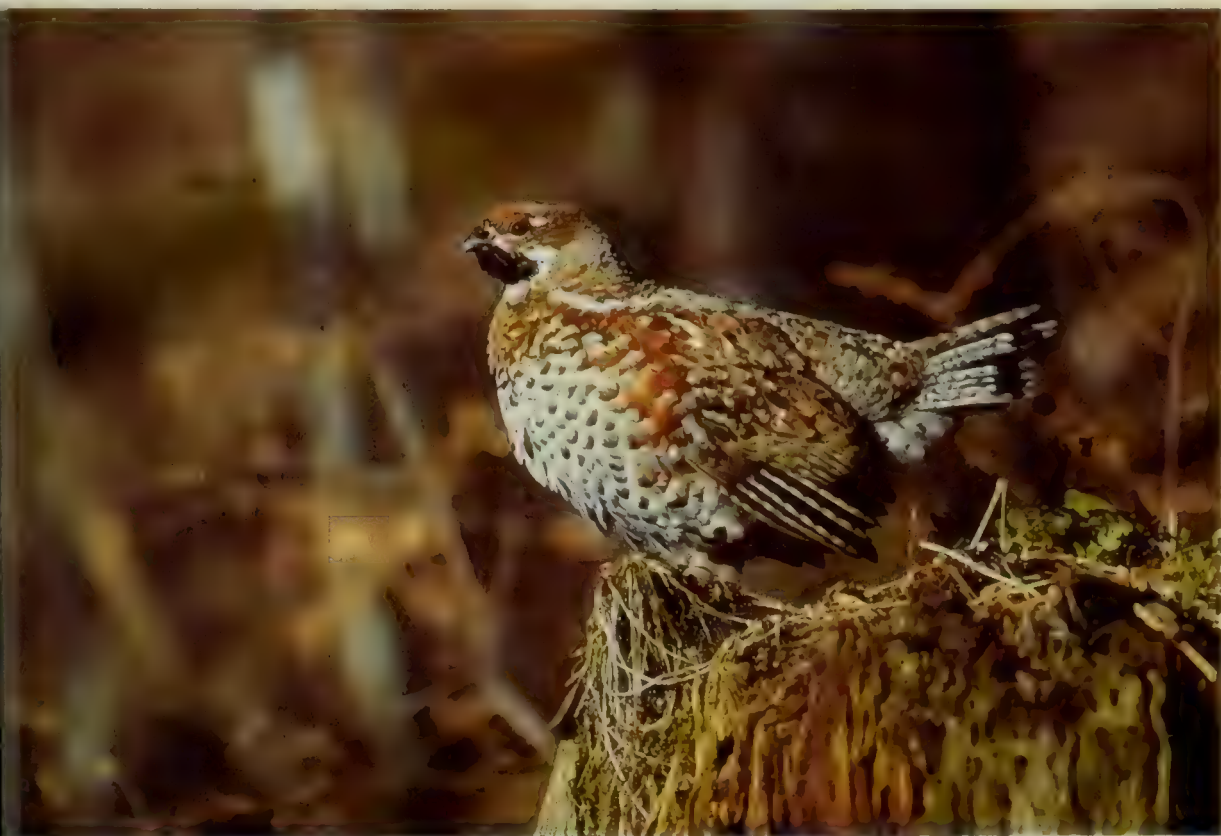
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The Hazel Grouse *Bonasa bonasia* occurs in the boreal and temperate climatic zones, especially but not exclusively in mountainous regions, and reaches its westerly limit in northern and southeastern France. Mountainous areas are favoured: nowadays the Vosges, the Jura, and the Alps, but until the beginning of the present century also in the Massif Central. Two mounted specimens in the Natural History Museum of Toulouse bear the inscription 'Pyrénées: 1900' and there have also been some recent but unchecked records there (Catusse 1984).

Surveys have shown a very sharp decline, especially in lowland areas in northeastern France in the past twenty-or-so years (Couturier 1964; Dronneau 1982). The breeding distribution is now very fragmented, with three isolated populations, in the Ardennes, in the Haute-Marne and in the Vosges. The precise causes of the decline are not known, but it may be due to changes in the habitat (forestry operations), ever-increasing disturbances, poaching and climatic fluctuations.



143. Male Hazel Grouse *Bonasa bonasia*, France, April 1985 (Jean-Louis Klein)

The photographs (plates 141-143) were taken at an altitude of 800 m in the southern Vosges, where a young plantation of common silver fir *Abies alba* adjoined mature stands of beech *Fagus sylvatica*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* with an understorey of rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and willow *Salix*.

At the end of winter, the Hazel Grouse searches for its food on the ground, where it picks up seeds and insect larvae at the edges of melting snow-patches. In spring, buds and catkins are important food resources.

N. LEFRANC

Musée, 11 rue St Charles, 88100 St Dié, France



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## Points of view

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'

### 15. Hunting, shooting and wildlife

Reactions to shooting and hunting are personal, and reflect upbringing as well as subsequent experience. Some of my friends and relations are keen sportsmen, and look forward to relaxing with a gun or riding to hounds.

Although I do not hesitate to shoot a grey squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* when I have just seen one eating a brood of young Goldfinches *Carduelis carduelis* as if they were bars of candy, or a rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* when my garden broccoli crop has vanished, my personal conscience does not allow me to kill other animals purely (or largely) for my own pleasure.

Why, then, do I not criticise my sporting friends? A look at the countryside provides the answer.

**QUESTION** Where are the best hedges, the unploughed corners, and the weedy winter strips, and where do the spinneys still remain? **ANSWER** Where Pheasants *Phasianus colchicus* are reared, released and shot for sport and where foxes *Vulpes vulpes* are hunted.

**QUESTION** Where are the moors managed (by careful burning) so that there is a variety of different ages of heather *Calluna/Erica*, from long and straggling for nest sites to short and tender to provide food and feeding areas? And where is moorland and bogland never destroyed by blanket forestry or by extensive commercial peat-cutting? **ANSWER** On estates where the Red Grouse *Lapogus lapogus* is nurtured and 'cropped' for sport, and for profit.

**QUESTION** Who is the naturalists' and conservationists' greatest ally whenever an estate manager wants to remove a hedgerow, bulldoze a wood, drain a damp meadow-corner or otherwise reduce the wildlife potential of a farmland area? **ANSWER** The gamekeeper, whose birds require just what is also needed for feeding, roosting and nesting by a wide variety of other birds and animals.

**QUESTION** Who, apart from birdwatchers and naturalists, wants to keep estuaries unpolluted and as free as possible of industrial reclamation? Who wants to maintain lakes and flooded gravel-pits undrained, and undisturbed by motor boats? **ANSWER** Wildfowlers.

Thus, whilst disapproving (in principle) of these sporting activities, their side effects are so beneficial to wildlife that (in practice) I cannot but be a

supporter of Pheasant-shooting, grouse-shooting, fox-hunting and wild-fowling. It would be unrealistic to expect our countryside to be maintained in a remotely comparable fashion by landowners fired solely by altruism rather than sporting or financial considerations.

I have no wish to offend either the sincere opponents of 'blood sports', whose views I sympathise with in theory, nor those engaged in 'country sports' (a less emotive term). My intention is to draw attention to a single fact that is so obvious to me: game preservation enhances the countryside for wildlife in general.

J. T. R. SHARROCK

Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ

## Notes



**Abnormal duration of parental care by male Blackbird** At 16.05 GMT on 14th April 1981, in the Cambridge University Botanic Garden, a female Blackbird *Turdus merula* collecting food for her six-day-old nestlings was killed by a Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* hunting in broad daylight. Her mate mobbed the owl furiously as it flew off; on several occasions during the next hour, he returned to the spot where his mate had been killed and gave alarm calls (both 'see' and 'tchook' notes). Feeling concern for the chicks, at 19.45 hours I inspected the nest from a distance and was surprised to find the male sitting. Further inspections at 22.00 and 04.00 hours confirmed that the male was probably spending the night brooding the young (the nest was clearly visible from 20m using 7 × 50 binoculars, since it was illuminated by a street lamp). Although male Blackbirds do not usually incubate eggs or brood nestlings, there are previous records which suggest that they will do so in the absence of a mate (e.g. D. Snow, 1958, *A Study of Blackbirds*). On 21st April (i.e. when 13 days old), three young fledged from the nest, leaving behind a dead nestling of about seven days of age. One of the three fledglings vanished on 11th May, but the male continued to feed two juveniles until 22nd May (although not marked, the male was easily recognised by the heavy wear on his tail). Parental care, therefore, lasted for at least 31 days after the young had left the nest. This contrasts with the usual period of about three weeks, both in the Botanic Garden (personal observations) and elsewhere (Snow 1958). There was no evidence that the young were so badly stunted that they required prolonged care in order to survive.

This abnormal behaviour by the male may have been influenced by the low probability of re-pairing (the population in the Botanic Garden has a male-biased sex ratio). I am not aware of any evidence that bereaved parents of any bird species usually show extended periods of parental care.

DAVID HARPER

Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology, Zoology Department,  
South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PS



**Bigamy by Treecreepers** Occasional cases of bigamy are known for several species of birds which are normally monogamous. The following instance of bigamy by Treecreepers *Certhia familiaris* seems worth recording, since the background to the case is known and since I am not aware of any previous reports of bigamy by this species. During the spring of 1981, there were two Treecreeper territories in the Cambridge University Botanic Garden, both of which contained an individually marked male and female. One of the males was not seen after 24th March, and his probable fate was discovered when I found a Treecreeper foot and lower mandible in the pellet of a Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* collected on 2nd April. Although both females seemed to remain faithful to the original territory boundaries, the surviving male was seen to sing on the territory previously held by the missing male. The male was first seen courtship feeding his original mate (female A) on 29th April, five days after she was first noted carrying nest material; he courtship fed her throughout incubation, and helped her to feed the nestlings until they fledged on 30th May. He also, however, began to spend increasing amounts of time with the other female (B); he was first seen to courtship feed her on 2nd May, while she was building a nest. As soon as female A's chicks had fledged, the male spent nearly all his time with female B, although he sometimes helped to feed female A's young. I did not see female A or her brood after 15th June. Female B's nest was successful, the young fledging on 13th June. Both parents accompanied this brood for longer than they fed the chicks. The last day on which I saw a chick being fed was 1st July, but both adults (in primary moult) and at least two chicks were still associating on 29th July. An interesting postscript to the above is that the bigamous male was killed by a Tawny Owl in May 1982 while paired, monogamously, to female B (for some reason, Treecreepers seem to be very vulnerable to predation by owls).

DAVID HARPER

*Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology, Zoology Department,  
South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PS*

**Huddling by juvenile Treecreepers** At 18.00 GMT, during the warm sunny evening of 22nd June 1982, in a garden at Bramley, Hampshire, I watched a family party of six Treecreepers *Certhia familiaris* in a tall oak *Quercus*. Through binoculars, I noticed that two juveniles were on the trunk, one 3m above the other, and the remaining two were on separate branches. The lower one on the trunk was motionless and emitting high-pitched cries until a food-laden adult approached. The juvenile then fluffed out its feathers, quivered, opened its bill, changed the note of its calls, and was promptly fed. After the parent had left, the uppermost juvenile crept down and settled at the side of its sibling; both then remained clinging to the trunk, facing skywards, motionless. At this moment, I saw that one of the juveniles on a branch was being fed by what I took to be the other parent, there not having been time for the first adult to have brought another meal. Simultaneously, the fourth juvenile left its branch and crept to join the other two, thus forming a clump of three with the newcomer in between and

slightly below the others, but in contact with them. Next, the remaining juvenile, now fed, took flight and landed on top of the backs of the upper two in the huddle, before shuffling down to take up a position on the left in the lower tier. All four of them stayed clumped together for 15 minutes, during which time they were repeatedly fed by the adults, which approached along the trunk, from above in the first instance, but then from below. On the first two occasions, the juvenile which had arrived last (the one now on the lower left edge of the huddle) was the sole bird to receive food. In between visits by the parents, the young remained quite still, but continued to utter high-pitched calls. Nevertheless, the huddle was difficult to locate, being almost impossible to see with the naked eye. Eventually, the juveniles separated, but at 18.40 hours two were again side by side at the same spot.

Other remarkable habits of juvenile Treecreepers include bittern-like 'freezing' (*Brit. Birds* 73: 315-316), but I have not come across descriptions of this sort of huddle, although the cohesion of Treecreeper family parties is well known, and the young are thought to return to their nest to roost after early flying forays (*Bird Study* 29: 287-302).

ROBERT A. CHEKE

8 Cecil Mansions, Marius Road, London SW17 7QN

**Choughs feeding on top of vegetation** On 1st August 1983, at Knockadoon Head, Co. Cork, I watched a family of four Choughs *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* (two adults and two juveniles) feeding. All four fed for long periods on top of a 0.5-1.0m high, dense stand of western gorse *Ulex gallii* and bell heather *Erica cinerea*. This vegetation completely covered the ground over a large area of clifftop. Some patches of gorse *U. europaeus* were also present, and this was the dominant vegetation in an adjoining area, but the Choughs ignored this altogether. Their manner of feeding was amusing to watch: they were unable to obtain solid perches, and on many occasions were in danger of falling through the vegetation to the ground; to prevent this, the wings were occasionally spread and flapped as their legs went through. They moved about on the vegetation by hopping, often spreading their wings to maintain balance, and occasionally by short flights. The Choughs were feeding on Lepidoptera larvae, green in colour and about 25mm long. They seemed very successful in obtaining them, and each made many catches in a short time. Although I searched the area later, however, I could find no larvae and the species was therefore not identified.

This unusual method of feeding may have been brought about by the prolonged dry spell during much of June, July and August. The clifftop at the time had a scorched look, and many plants had died or were showing the effects of severe drought; the soil was baked hard and invertebrates were no doubt scarce or absent in the top 5cm. At a rainfall station 1 km from the coast and 2 km from the site of the observation, only 6.6mm of rain fell (on two days) between 16th June and 14th August. I. D. Bullock (*in litt.*) never saw such feeding behaviour during his fieldwork for the 1982 Chough Census (*Brit. Birds* 76: 377-401); he stated that, even in a year of normal rainfall, July and August can be difficult months for Choughs, as this is



when their numbers are highest (adults plus juveniles) and soil invertebrates are scarcest in the often dry and crusty coastal soils, forcing the Choughs to feed on the surface more than at other times.

I am grateful to P. Hyde, who kindly supplied the rainfall data.

PATRICK SMIDDY  
*Ballykenneally, Ballymacoda, Co. Cork*

**Iris colour of Daurian Jackdaw** I was interested to read D. I. M. Wallace's caption to the recent 'PhotoSpot' of Daurian Jackdaw *Corvus dauuricus* (*Brit. Birds* 77: 417-418). It did not mention the species' characteristic dark eye which immediately distinguishes Daurian Jackdaw from Jackdaw *C. monedula*, which has a white iris. This feature is particularly useful when confronted with a dark-phase Daurian, which closely resembles a Jackdaw.

Another useful feature is the extent of black on the underparts of Daurian Jackdaw. It reaches down well on to the breast in a distinctive gorget which, even on dark-phase individuals, contrasts well with the grey underparts. On Jackdaw, only the chin and throat are black, showing no strong contrast with breast and the rest of the underparts, which are uniform blackish/grey.

DAVID FISHER  
*56 Western Way, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 1DU*

**Raven rolling on ground to avoid Peregrine** In the spring of 1982, I made several visits to monitor the progress of a breeding pair of Peregrines *Falco peregrinus*. I sometimes witnessed a brief 'dog fight' between the Peregrines and a family party of Ravens *Corvus corax* which had bred nearby. The Ravens frequently took evasive action by rolling over in the air, but I was surprised on one occasion to see one perform this manoeuvre on the ground. As the Peregrine approached, the Raven rolled over on to its back, presenting its feet to the attacker, and then completed the roll to regain its feet as the raptor passed over less than a metre above it: not perhaps a totally unexpected action, but one which I have not seen recorded before.

JOHN BARNES  
*Fach Goch, Waenfawr, Caernarfon, Gwynedd LL55 4YS*

## Letters

**'British Birds' and conservation** In reading through the last four years' back numbers of *British Birds* I have to praise you for its overall quality, its presentation and the high standard of the articles.

Nowhere, however, can I find a major article on any aspect of conservation. While Britain, Europe and the World disappear before our binoculars, we continue to read with great interest competent papers and letters on, for example, was it or wasn't it a Royal Tern *Sterna maxima* or a Lesser Crested Tern *S. bengalensis*, or perhaps a discussion on the relative colours of a bird's bare parts, while the species itself is probably decreasing

so fast that only museum skins will remain at the end of the century.

In the latest Nature Conservancy Council's strategy document (see also *Brit. Birds* 77: 433), conservationists—for that is what we are all termed as—are called timid, apologetic, submissive and retaining a low peck-order position in the league of land and resource interests. Our protests must, however, be ever louder, for the 'Engine of destruction' (as it is called by Junior Environmental Minister William Waldegrave) is extremely well organised and very practical in the art of further expansion of its aims and interests. Should not *British Birds* be devoting much more space to conservation issues?

E. E. GREEN

22 Reeve Road, Holyport, Maidenhead, Berkshire

We believe that major articles on conservation topics are currently published very satisfactorily by other journals and magazines. We see *British Birds* as a vehicle for the publication of readable, conservation-related papers (e.g. 'The status of the Golden Eagle [*Aquila chrysaetos*] in Britain', *Brit. Birds* 77: 592-607; 'The Dartford Warbler [*Sylvia undata*] in 1984 Britain', *Brit. Birds* 78: 269-280; and the recent papers on Merlins *Falco columbarius*: *Brit. Birds* 79: 155-170, 170-185). We also regularly cover conservation items in 'News and comment'. Rather than trying to duplicate the role of, for instance, the RSNCC's journal *Natural World*, we try to ensure that our current content is reasonably well balanced, providing a monthly mix acceptable to active birdwatchers who want to read (mostly) about birds. As one of our number commented, *The Sun* does not have detailed financial reports, and *The Financial Times* does not have a 'page 3 picture'. Eps

**Help for the Snowy Owls?** For good reason, the practice of introducing species is frowned upon, and Mr Terry's proposal (*Brit. Birds* 78: 286-287) to end the spinsterhood of Shetland's Snowy Owls *Nyctea scandiaca* should rightly be treated with caution. Since Snowy Owls have been resident in Shetland for almost two decades, one may, however, be permitted to doubt that they pose any threat to the ecological equilibrium; further, as most got there naturally, one could claim that what is proposed is only in part an introduction. As such, there is surely no great ethical problem in rectifying one of nature's minor oversights: to wit a male owl to woo the female owls. One could even stretch a point for the purists and claim that, as the species bred in 1967-75, and as remains dating from the Late Ice Age have been found in Britain, such a move would technically be a re-introduction. The British list accommodates approaching a dozen aliens, from four continents. Is it too much to ask that such a magnificent species be given a helping hand by man? The Snowy Owl is native to the wider zoological region that includes Shetland, and such an extension of its range would not unduly distort its present distribution.

JOHN CANTELO

17 Clyde Street, Canterbury CT1 1NA

I am against the 'introduction' of species anywhere in the world, but releasing one or two captive males would seem to be without risks, except perhaps to the owls themselves. The Snowy Owl is a rare and beautiful bird, and any action that can increase its population, whether in the UK or elsewhere, should be welcomed.

D. R. COAN

Charlwood, Bretton Lane, Bretton, Chester CH4 0DX



I shall never forget the thrill I experienced in 1967 when, during filming, I was the first person to see the first chick hatched. Nevertheless, I would be against any introduction. In the nine years the owls bred, over 20 chicks fledged, yet, by 1985, there were probably only two Snowy Owls in Shetland—both females. Surely this suggests that Shetland cannot provide the right habitat for a viable population? The RSPB afforded around-the-clock protection for the breeding owls. Better the cost of such an expensive operation be spent on a more worthwhile cause. After all, Snowy Owls have a healthy world distribution—and who could guarantee a male Snowy released on Fetlar would choose the reserve to breed on? DENNIS COUTTS

*Da Knowe, South End, Lerwick, Shetland*

I support the idea. The fact that females are present and laying would indicate that breeding conditions exist. It seems a great pity that we should sit back and watch a breeding species disappear without another attempt to establish it (see *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland*, page 253).

KEITH R. DYE

*104 Wolseley Road, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk NR31 0EJ*

During seven years as RSPB warden on Fetlar (1977-83), I was never swayed from my total opposition to any introduction programme. My reasons are multifold. Nine consecutive years of successful breeding (1967-75) failed to establish a viable population: the adult male never tolerated young males in his territory, so the six males of the 20 young that fledged were compelled to disperse outside Fetlar. By the time the old male disappeared, in late autumn 1975, there were no young males left in Shetland.

Without a plague of rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* and mice, Fetlar would be too small to support two pairs of Snowy Owls. Unst is probably the only other island in Shetland suitable for breeding. One pair would be most unlikely to be self-sustaining for more than a few years.

There could be no justification for taking a male from its normal range (presumably from northern Scandinavia or Iceland) in order to resurrect extralimital, 'freak' breeding in Shetland. The release of a captive-bred male would have inherent problems, and inevitably gain the label 'artificial' or 'feral'.

One of four female owls on Fetlar in November 1983 was definitely immature, clear evidence of continued occasional immigration, and an adult male was seen on Fair Isle in May 1979; had the latter wandered to Fetlar, breeding would probably have recommenced. Thus, there remains the chance of renewed natural breeding.

Fetlar currently has major conservation problems, associated with agricultural development, whereby the prime moorland habitat with its breeding communities of waders, terns *Sterna* and skuas *Stercorarius* is under threat of fragmentation. Really, the island can do without the extra pressures that would result from breeding Snowy Owls until such time as the current problems are resolved. Nonetheless, I hope that breeding by

Snowy Owls resumes in due course without interference by man.

NICK DYMOND

*Eyre Bird Observatory, Eyre Telegraph Station, Cocklebidy, via Norseman, 6443,  
Western Australia*

I agree with Mike Terry that it would be sensible to introduce a few males, unless there are other and valid objections. One or two little birds ('*Parvaornis garrulus*') have, however, whispered to me that the 'ecologically sound' objections to 'interfering with Nature' by introducing males, although the *good* reason for not doing so, are not the real ones; these were or are the havoc caused to breeding Whimbrels *Numenius phaeopus* and other rare breeders by the owls when feeding their young. If this is so, I think it should be stated openly to allow of rational discussion. It always seems to me ridiculous to make arbitrary distinctions between (a) species that got here through man taking them from elsewhere and releasing them and species that certainly flew here on their own wings but could never have done so and/or survived once here but for the activities of man; and (b) species that were established here within historic times and others that were not (but might well have been).

DEREK GOODWIN

*6 Crest View Drive, Petts Wood, Kent BR5 1BY*

Birds of prey have been particularly susceptible to the effects of man's actions. It seems to me that this introduction would be one way to help a species which has suffered much at our hands, and which is by no means common. If some unforeseeable natural or man-made disaster were to befall the Scandinavian population, how would we then feel about having given the species no aid when we had it in our power to do so? A number of factors, however, need to be taken into account, one being the ecological niche the owls are to occupy: were it to be proved that a breeding population of Snowy Owls on Fetlar was competing with an already established species to the detriment of that species, then the whole case would need to be carefully reconsidered.

I. JOHNSTON

*4 Wyndham Park, Ardbeg, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 0NT*

Introduce at once to the UK at Fetlar *males* to the lone females. Do not hesitate.

CYNTHIA LONGFIELD

*The Park House, Cloyne, Cork, Ireland*

Your editorial comment states that 'Snowy Owls are failing to become established as their initial natural colonisation peters out', yet, if the check to their establishing themselves lies in the mere accident of an unfortunate sex ratio, surely we are being unduly scrupulous in objecting to Mike Terry's timely suggestion? I cherish the hope that Fetlar-bred Snowy Owls may eventually find their way down to this county, where, I suspect, few birdwatchers would grudge them the occasional Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*, an introduction with much less respectable credentials.

CHARLES A. MILNER

*Outwoods Edge, Nanpantan, Loughborough, Leicestershire*



The question of re-introducing a male Snowy Owl to Fetlar is now largely academic, since the last female appears finally to have left. Lest the RSPB be thought at fault for not having acted earlier, however, readers may like to consider some of the many reasons why it would not have been a good idea.

Life in Shetland was not always a bed of roses for the owls. Their fortunes appeared to be closely tied to those of their rabbit prey. When they first nested, in 1967, the rabbit population was extremely strong; in that year, five young were reared from seven eggs. After myxomatosis arrived in 1970, the owls went into a decline. It was not until 1975, when the rabbits were beginning to recover, that breeding success was high again. In the lean years their problems had been aggravated by the divided attentions of the male, with female young from previous years reaching breeding age and competing with the older female (Robinson & Becker 1986).

A steady, assured food supply is a prerequisite for introducing any creature anywhere, and there would have been a stronger case for bringing in a male after 1975 had the rabbit population been stable. In fact, myxomatosis swept through again in 1983 and all but wiped out the rabbits for a second time.

In at least four years, the wardens had to supplement the owls' diet when no prey was being delivered by the male. These periods usually coincided with spells of mist and rain—not too uncommon in a Shetland summer. At times, the wardens' involvement went farther than just providing food at the nest: two young had to be taken into care (both subsequently died), the male was treated for an eye infection, and there were two accidents involving barbed wire.

Had a male been introduced, he would have been landed with an undependable food supply and torn apart by avid females.

MARTIN ROBINSON

*Balrobbie Farm, Killiecrankie, Pitlochry, Perthshire PH16 5LJ*

I very much agree with Mike Terry's letter. I've thought the same myself for years.

HARRY VILKAITIS

*10 Suffolk Close, North Anston, near Sheffield S31 7EA*

This is not the first time that the introduction of Snowy Owls into Scotland has been suggested (see e.g. Nevard & Penfold 1978). The distinction between 'introduction', and 're-introduction' of species eliminated *by man*, needs to be considered in the light of the fact that there are in effect no habitats in Britain that have not been greatly changed by man. In such a situation, a non-intervention conservation policy (preserving a habitat in whatever state it happens to be in at a particular time) does not make sense. One should do everything possible to maximise the nature-conservation interest of a site. If this philosophy is adopted, the judicious introduction of those species unlikely to have deleterious effects on either economic interests or other members of the ecosystem should be encouraged, as increased diversity is a proper aim for a conservation policy (Moore 1985). Introductions have diversified the British flora by at least 239 species

(Ratcliffe 1984). There seems scope for the introduction of a number of species of vertebrates: particularly birds, which are less likely than many mammals to clash with man's economic interests (Nevard & Penfold 1978).

If the general desirability of introduction is adopted, the main question in the case of Snowy Owls is the probability of success. During historical times, the Snowy Owl does not seem to have been a regular breeder in Britain, although it was apparently much more common in Shetland during the 1860s (Perry 1978), when Britain's mean annual temperature was lower than it is today (Goudie 1983; Lamb 1982). This suggests that temperature may limit either rate of colonisation or breeding success of Snowy Owls in Britain, as appears to be so with Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* (Wilkinson 1984) and possibly for a number of arctic visitors to Britain (Williamson 1975).

Although Britain is on the edge of the Snowy Owl's present range, it seems possible that, with the help of an introduction programme, the species would be able to establish itself in Scotland. This would make an interesting addition to our avifauna and should, in my view, be welcomed.

DAVID M. WILKINSON

35 Meadow Lane, Worsley, Manchester M28 4PL

Your editorial comment on Mike Terry's proposal that male Snowy Owls be introduced on Fetlar, Shetland, in the hope of re-establishing breeding (*Brit. Birds* 78: 286-287) hit one nail squarely on the head: there really is no comparison between the Snowy Owl situation and that of the re-introduced White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*. On the one hand, we have a species well outside its normal breeding range, perhaps attempting to colonise: a natural process which should be allowed to run its course and result in either success or failure. On the other, we have a 'lost' species, exterminated by man and almost certainly unable to recolonise on its own, which man is successfully restoring to a still-suitable environment.

The RSPB has been approached many times over the possible introduction of a male Snowy Owl to Fetlar. It has resisted these calls partly because it believes that it is wrong to interfere to this extent with the natural process outlined above, but also because it has become quite clear that the owls were never entirely 'at home' on Fetlar and were best regarded as a pleasant and exciting 'accident'. Their breeding was an interesting event in its own right, and one which would be spoiled if meddled with. It is surely stretching a point to regard the Snowy Owl as properly belonging to our British breeding avifauna, which seems to be one of Mike Terry's main arguments. It is obvious that they were experiencing difficulties in obtaining the right kind of food from an unpredictable supply (Robinson & Becker 1986) and that the Fetlar environment is unlikely to sustain them as a breeding species. If another wild male appears, and the owls try again, the RSPB will provide protection as before, but will continue to believe that there is no justification for attempts at artificial reinstatement. It follows that the RSPB is also opposed to any idea of releasing captive-bred Snowy Owls into the wild in Britain to establish a 'British population', as has been suggested on more than one occasion.



There are sound conservation reasons for re-introducing White-tailed Eagles, which are still an endangered or declining species over much of their remaining European range. There is none for tampering with the Snowy Owls on Fetlar. Snowy Owls may indeed be very rare in their normal range in most years, but this is a function of the delicate balance that exists between them and their cyclical food supply and is not a problem for conservationists.

M. J. EVERETT

RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL

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Apart from allowing the official RSPB viewpoint to follow all the other contributions, we have published these diverse comments in alphabetical sequence. It will be noted, of course, that only two of our 14 correspondents had privileged prior knowledge of the paper on Fetlar Snowy Owls which appears earlier in this issue. The immediate 'gut reaction' of most birdwatchers would probably be that it would be nice to maintain this magnificent bird as a British breeding species, and that giving it a helping hand could be justified. Years of considered assessment of the pros and cons by the RSPB, however, have led to the view—summarised especially by Nick Dymond, Mike Everett and Martin Robinson—that introduction of a male is not justified, is not sensible and in any case would probably not help the species to succeed in colonising Shetland or even to maintain its foothold on Fetlar. Unless circumstances change, this correspondence is now closed. Eds

## Announcements

**'British Birds' in Thailand 1986** The special 'BB' tour to Thailand during 24th January to 11th February 1986 was a huge success. The 16 days in the field resulted in the very high total of 354 species, including all the expected Palearctic migrants, such as Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*, Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*, Greater Sand Plover *C. leschenaultii*, Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura*, Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*, Long-toed Stint *C. subminuta*, Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*, Pacific Swift *Apus pacificus*, Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*, Siberian Blue Robin *L. cyane*, Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*, Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*, Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*, Radde's Warbler *P. schwarzi*, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella*

*certhiola*, Lanceolated Warbler *L. lanceolata*, Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa latirostris*, Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* and Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*.

Among the many notable other birds were Painted Stork *Ibis leucocephalus*, Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni*, Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos*, four species of green pigeon *Treron*, Ashy Wood-Pigeon *Columba pulchricollis*, Banded Kingfisher *Lacedo pulchella*, Great Slaty Woodpecker *Melleripicus pulverulentus*, Dusky Broadbill *Corydon sumatranus*, Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii*, Fire-capped Tit *Cephalopyrus flammiceps*, River Chat *Thamnolaea leucocephala*, Dark-sided Thrush *Zoothera marginata*, Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus boulboul*, Chestnut Thrush *T. rubrocanus*, Grey-sided Thrush *T. jeae*, 13 species of *Phylloscopus* warbler, Slaty-bellied Tesia *Tesia olivea*, Chestnut-headed Tesia *T. castaneocoronata*, Stub-tailed Bush Warbler *Cettia squameiceps*, 19 species of flycatcher including Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophciata* and Slaty-blue Flycatcher *F. tricolor*, and Mangrove Whistler *Pachycephala cinerea*.

The flights to and from Bangkok were by *Thai Airways International*, who gave the group special terms and an extra, free baggage allowance. Advice concerning the trip was given by the bird tour company *Sunbird*. We are most grateful to both these organisations for helping us to provide a most educational and enjoyable trip. (See plate 144.)

**144.** The 'British Birds' trip to Thailand, January-February 1986. Participants at site in Khao Yai National Park of Slaty-backed Forktails *Enicurus schistaceus* and Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*. Left to right, standing, Phil Tizzard, Charles Milner, Stephen Rumsey, Dr Evert Ten Cate, Dr Sid Perry, and Phil Round (leader); sitting, Dennis Buisson, Mrs Jeanne Dale, Norman Hall, and JTRS (Dennis Buisson)





**'British Birds' in Thailand 1987?** The trip to Thailand in January-February 1986 was such a success that we are considering running a repeat in January, February or March 1987 if there is sufficient support. (Some Palearctic migrants are slow to move south into Thailand, so a trip is best from January onwards rather than earlier in the winter.) We found that there was great benefit to all participants in every member of the group being of a 'BB'-reader level of interest. We also consider that a small group is essential for forest-trail birdwatching, so we intend to limit the 1987 group to not more than the size of that in 1986 (eight subscribers plus two leaders).

If you are interested in the possibility of being one of the eight 'BB' readers to accompany Phil Round and Tim Sharrock in 1987, please write AT ONCE to BB Thai Tour 1987, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

**'Bird Guide of Thailand'** A very limited supply of this standard work, by Dr Boonsong Lekagul and Edward Cronin, is in transit from Thailand and can be made available for purchase by 'BB' subscribers through British BirdShop *for one month only*. Please use the form on page xiii now.

**New books in British BirdShop** In addition to *Bird Guide of Thailand* (see above) and the continuing special offers concerning *Shorebirds: an identification guide to the waders of the world* and volumes I and II of *The Birds of Africa* (see page 213 last month), we can now also offer the following new book:

Owen, Atkinson-Willes & Salmon *Wildfowl of Great Britain* (2nd edn)

Please use the form on page xiii now.

## Requests

**Hampshire tetrad atlas breeding survey** This year marks the start of a four-year survey organised by the Hampshire Ornithological Society to map the distribution of breeding birds in the county. We hope that all birders resident in or visiting the county will take part. Full details including recording cards can be obtained from Peter Puckering, 17 Taplings Road, Weeke, Winchester, Hampshire.

**Skua photographs** For a forthcoming paper in *British Birds* on field identification of Pomarine *Stercorarius pomarinus*, Arctic *S. parasiticus* and Long-tailed Skuas *S. longicaudus*, photographs (colour transparencies, colour prints and black-and-white prints) are needed for reference purposes and for possible publication. Please indicate whether the photographs should be returned after use. Full acknowledgment will be made in the paper. Comments on skua identification will be welcomed by the author, Klaus Malling Olsen, Møllegaade 21, st.t.h., DK 2200 Copenhagen N, Denmark. All photographs should be sent to the editorial office: British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

**Coastal and inland Pomarine Skuas in autumn/winter 1985** Unusually large numbers of Pomarine Skuas *Stercorarius pomarinus* were recorded on autumn passage in northern and eastern Scotland, with particularly substantial numbers remaining in the Moray Firth area well into the winter, and south along the English east and south coasts at least to Dorset. A paper on this exceptional influx is being compiled for *British Birds*, and any records anywhere in Britain and Ireland of numbers of adults (with information on colour phases involved) or juveniles, together with date, time and locality of observations, would be greatly appreciated. Any additional information on the behaviour of the birds or details of how this season's numbers compare with previous years would also be very welcome. All contributions will be fully acknowledged and should be sent to Simon Aspinall, RSPB Highland Office, Munloch, Ross & Cromarty IV88ND, or Tony Fox, Nature Conservancy Council, Fraser Darling House, 9 Culduthel Road, Inverness IV2 4AG.

## News and comment

*Robin Prytherch and Mike Everett*

**Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'**

**Condor news** Even the tamest of conservation-minded people must have been staggered by the astonishing reports coming out of California concerning the California Condor *Gymnogyps californianus*. Bungling decisions and verbal battles between the various groups concerned confirm one's worst fears for the future of this most endangered of species. Its recent history and present status, together with all the political detail, has been clearly reported by Mark J. Palmer in *Sierra* (January/February 1986). That issue went to press with 21 captive condors and only six left in the wild, including a known breeding pair. Then, in December 1985, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service declared that the six wild birds would be taken into captivity during the coming month (relatively easy to do, since they all carried radio collars). The National Audubon Society reacted by bringing a suit to prevent the capture programme, and this was upheld by a Federal judge in early February. But, during January, one of the six wild birds was found dead—and it was the breeding female. It died from the effects of lead poisoning, just like several of the other condors that have died. Dr R. L. Flood has been in California recently and these extracts from his letter to us highlight some of the problems:

'At a condor watch site near Mount Pinos,

California, on the 17/1/1986 I met Greg Sanders from the National Audubon Society Condor Research Center based in Ventura, California. He informed me of the following facts. There are only five birds left in a wild state and less than thirty (*sic*) in captivity. The gene pool is considered to be sufficient to carry out a breeding programme successfully, with ten separate strands in the population as a whole and six strands of the wild population represented in the captive colony. Research into breeding possibilities of the family Cathartidae in captivity has been very promising... It does appear, however, that the main threat to the birds' survival in the wild state, that of lead left overs from the hunting sector, has not gone away. The threat to the wild birds is still acute, although, as Greg Sanders pointed out, removing the wild birds also removes the necessary pressures required to maintain the appropriate protection over the area. With this scenario, it appears that, no matter how successful the breeding programme turns out to be, the condor will have no natural home to return to. The issue is thus not only controversial, but also very complex. Whatever the outcome may be, I shall never forget the experience of watching twenty per cent of the wild condor population all crammed into the one bird I was privileged to see.'

Mark Palmer summed up his *Sierra* article



with these totally appropriate words: 'Perhaps most important, the extinction of the wild California Condor will represent a fundamental failure on the part of humankind to resolve environmental problems. A permanent captive population of birds is not a viable species from an ecological point of view. Indeed, if we are only interested in saving condors in cages, we are sweeping the problem of maintaining a habitable world under the proverbial rug—for condors and humans alike.'

### Jerdon's Courser rediscovered in India

Jerdon's Courser *Cursorius bitorquatus* has been rediscovered in Andhra Pradesh, India, 86 years after the last documented record of the species. A single bird was located on 17th January 1986 in an area of scrub jungle in Cuddaph District. The exciting discovery is the culmination of intensive fieldwork by the Bombay Natural History Society, a leading member organisation of the Indian Section of ICBP.

Jerdon's Courser is a ground-dwelling bird, roughly the shape and size of the Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. With a strongly contrasting black-and-white head pattern and with broad, double white bands dividing a rufous throat and brown breast, it is striking and could not be confused with any other Indian bird. Future work will aim to determine the species' exact distribution and conservation needs, though this may be difficult as it is now thought to be nocturnal. This huge boost to the BNHS Endangered Species Project will hopefully inspire searches for other little-known and possibly extinct Indian birds, such as Forest Little Owl *Athene blewitti* and Mountain Quail *Ophrysia superciliosa*. (ICBP Press release)

**Osprey tree damage** During January 1986, the famous nest tree of the Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* at Loch Garten was vandalised with a chain saw, causing destruction of the nest platform. Following advice from tree surgeons, the RSPB will bolt substitute branches on to the remaining trunk and then fix an artificial nest platform to the top. Ospreys take readily to artificial sites, so let us hope that this pair does not even notice the change.

**Record 'BB' delivery?** Our Managing Editor and other members of the 'BB' group

in Thailand were delighted to receive by Air Mail a copy of the February issue in Chiang Mai on 4th February. (The Post Office delivered the regular copy to Blunham two days later, on 6th February!)

**SOS mystery photographs winner** The Sussex Ornithological Society/BTO one-day conference at Haywards Heath on 18th January included a BB mystery photographs competition, arranged and run on our behalf by Tim Davis and Tony Marr. Of the 200 conference participants, only 22 entered the competition. There were four all-correct entries, with that from Cliff Dean drawn as the winner of the traditional bottle of champagne.

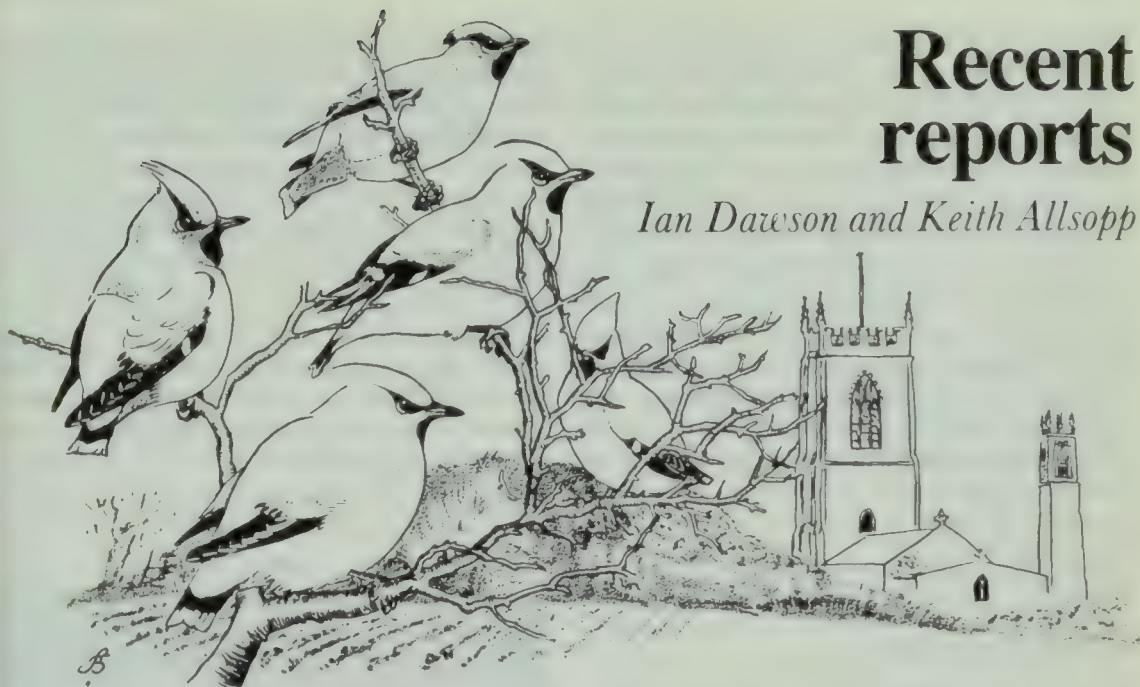
**Incorrect English name?** In view of the note in the last issue of *British Birds* (79: 208-209), should the Great Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus giganteus* be renamed the Great April Phoolarope?

**More smiles** Three more amusements which have been brought to our notice. First, Ken Hall spotted the following in the 1984 report on *The Birds of Rutland Water*: 'Manx Shearwater. Following severe north-westerly winds, a Manx Shearwater was found in the public toilets in the Bluebell pub at Stoney Stanton. It spent the night at the Heather Bells pub before being brought to Rutland Water and released on Lagoon 1.' Ken adds that 'the bird was obviously disorientated. Boggled, you might say.' Secondly, J. M. Allen, Joan V. Nye and Robin Stride all spotted the following in the *Daily Telegraph* for 3rd February 1986: 'Minsmere nature reserve in Suffolk was visited by a record number of 232 bird species last year, among them an Eastern European black-winged prating cole.' Lastly, Anne Lightfoot and Mrs D. M. Bradley both pointed out a report in the *Times* of 14th January 1986 that a man 'admitted burgling the aviary at London zoo to steal a short-haired owl'. Had it just been to the barber's?

**Changes of Recorder** Gordon R. Avery, 12 Hemmingsdale Road, Hempsted, Gloucester GL2 6HN, has taken over from Rick Goater as Recorder for Gloucestershire. T. Gravett, Tyddyn Llan, Eglwsbach, Colwyn Bay LL28 5TY, has taken over as Recorder from R. S. Thomas for Caernarvonshire (Gwynedd) and from K. G. Croft for Anglesey and Denbighshire.

# Recent reports

Ian Dawson and Keith Allsopp



These are largely unchecked reports, not authenticated records

The dates in this report refer to February unless otherwise stated.

A blocking anticyclone to the northeast, which established a flow of very cold air from Siberia, remained in position for the whole month. Temperatures stayed below freezing for days at a time in some areas and dropped frequently below  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ , giving the coldest February since 1947. Eastward-moving low-pressure centres passing to the south brought occasional unsettled snowy conditions to southern counties, but snow cover in lowland areas was not thick.

The severe weather inevitably caused much hardship to those species which obtain their food from the soil. **Lapwings** *Vanellus vanellus* passed south over Hilton (Cambridgeshire) at 1,000 per hour on 6th, and became virtually absent from much of England, having moved south and west: those in Northern Ireland were so desperate that many appeared in gardens, oblivious of people. **Redwings** *Turdus iliacus* and **Fieldfares** *T. pilaris* also came into gardens and town centres, desperately seeking food. Many passerines moved out or gathered into large flocks at a few suitable feeding sites: **Skylarks** *Alauda arvensis* flew south at 1,000 per hour over Hilton on 6th and there were 2,000 at Little Paxton (Cambridgeshire) throughout the month, and a concentration of 460 **Corn Buntings** *Miliaria calandra* at Filey (North Yorkshire) on 8th.

## Wildfowl

**Wigeons** *Anas penelope* appeared in much larger numbers than usual in many haunts,

including the Ouse Washes (Norfolk/Cambridgeshire), where there were counts of 28,892 on 13th January and 30,831 on 17th February. Perhaps surprisingly, the weather conditions brought no abnormal influxes, though there were certainly more **Smews** *Mergus albellus* than usual, with some 40 in the Dungeness area (Kent), 19, including six drakes, at Holyfield Marsh Gravel-pit (Hampshire) on 13th, and many other small groups in the Midlands and southeast England: others reached west to Wigan (Greater Manchester), Abergele (Clwyd), and the Kent Estuary (Cumbria) where there were five on 25th, and north to Loch of Strathbeg (Grampian). Four **Brent Geese** *Branta bernicla* of the pale-bellied race *hrota* at Sandwich (Kent) from 20th to 25th were refugees from the Continent, as perhaps were four **Bean Geese** *Anser fabalis* in Shetland. Other notable wildfowl here, despite rather than because of the weather conditions, included a **Snow Goose** *A. caerulescens* at Dirleton (Lothian), and a **Brent Goose** of the race *nigricans* in the Pagham area (West Sussex) together with a **Red-breasted Goose** *B. ruficollis*, with another of this species still in the Blackwater area (Essex). A **Teal** *Anas crecca* of the Nearctic race *carolinensis* appeared in Shetland, and inland an **Eider** *Somateria mollissima* at St Ives (Cambridgeshire) on 6th, and a **Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca* at Grafham Water (Cambridgeshire) on 9th were unusual. Even more so was a solitary eider at Porthscatho (Cornwall) all month which turned out to be a female **King Eider** *S. spectabilis*, whilst a showy drake



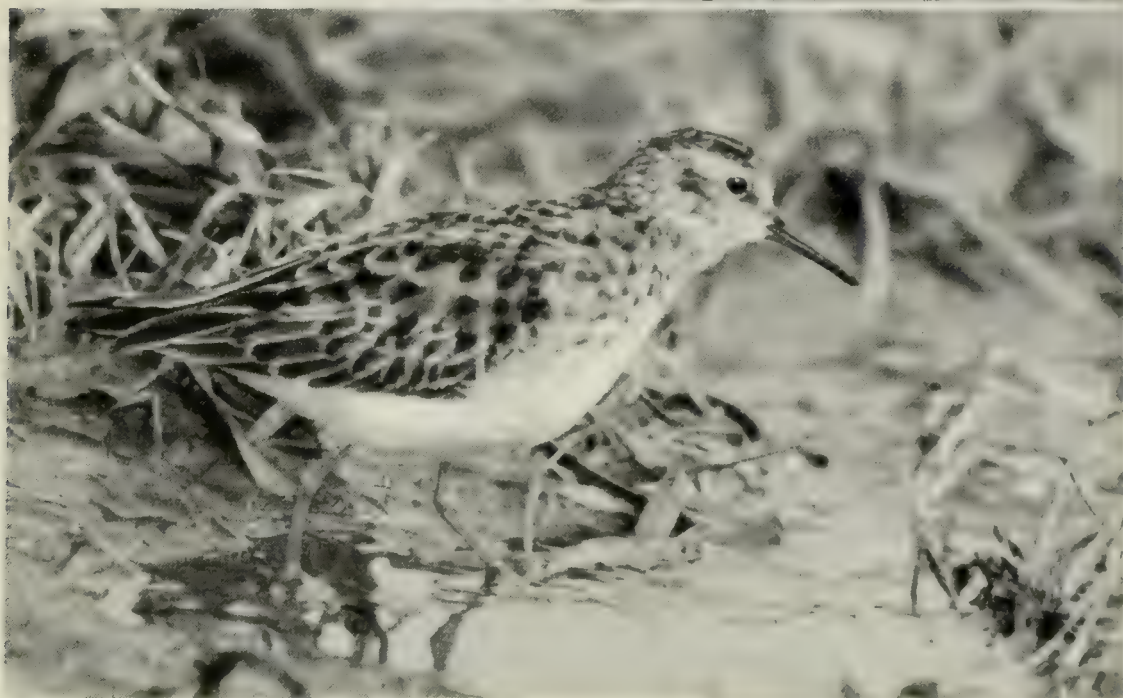
graced Tayport (Fife). A drake **Surf Scoter** *M. perspicillata* at Llanfairfechan (Gwynedd) from 12th to at least 22nd was perhaps the one seen in January farther along the North Wales coast, while on opposite sides of the Firth of Forth there were two in Gosford Bay (Lothian) and three in Largo Bay (Fife). Long-stayers included a **Snow Goose** and **Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis* on the Wexford Slobs (Co. Wexford), an **American Black Duck** *Anas rubripes* at Tynninghame (Lothian), and **Ring-necked Ducks** *Aythya collaris* at Frimley and Ash Vale Gravel-pits (Surrey/Hampshire) and a pair at Drift Reservoir/Marazion (Cornwall). Finally, a **Ross's Goose** *A. rossii* near Arbroath (Tayside) raises the perennial problem of how wild are wildfowl?

### Other water birds

Unusual grebes and divers were very thinly reported. There were up to seven **Black-throated Divers** *Gavia arctica* off Southend Pier (Essex) in the first half of the month, and two together inland on Marsh Lane Gravel-pit (Cambridgeshire) around 9th. **Red-throated Divers** *G. stellata* (plate 150) were apparently in normal numbers. **White-billed Divers** *G. adamsii* remained in Shetland and at Ardglass (Co. Down) all month (plates 147-149), while another was picked up dead at Filey on 18th. A scattering of **Red-necked Grebes** *Podiceps grisegena* included one on Windermere (Cumbria) on

**145 & 146.** Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*, Cornwall, February 1986 (S. C. Hutchings)

2nd, later found dead; a **Black-necked Grebe** *P. nigricollis* at Filey from 8th to at least 20th was only the fifth record for there, and a **Slavonian Grebe** *P. auritus* was a good find on the River Avon in the centre of Evesham (Hêreford & Worcester) on 25th, together with a **Shag** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*. An adult **Gannet** *Sula bassana* broke all the rules when it spent a week at Ogston Reservoir (Derbyshire) from 3rd, catching trout. There were odd sightings of **Little Auks** *Alle alle* around our coasts, with singles inland at Peterborough (Cambridgeshire) on 1st, on Wilstone Reservoir, Tring (Hertfordshire), and Queen Mother Reservoir (Berkshire) on 2nd, with the only large numbers being 60 passing Anstruther (Fife)





in half an hour on 17th. Heavy mortality of **Guillemots** *Uria aalge* was noted in Orkney, with 125 found dead on 1½-km of beach. There was one inland, with the Peterborough Little Auk noted above.

**Bitterns** *Botaurus stellaris* turned up at Marsh Lane Gravel-pit and Swithland Reservoir (Leicestershire), though they may not have survived the freeze-up, which was certainly the case for an unfortunate immature **Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* picked up dead at Bawdsey (Suffolk) on 14th. The **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* (plate 120) hopefully fared better at Yeovil (Somerset), while a **Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* remained on the River Lynher (Cornwall), and another spent much of January on Havergate Island (Suffolk).

An errant **Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* stayed from 19th to 22nd January at, appropriately, the RSPB Loch of Strathbeg Reserve. Single **Grey Phalaropes** *Phalaropus fulicarius* at Whitby (North Yorkshire) all month and South Gare (Cleveland) around 20th were typical winter records. Less usual was an unseasonal **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* at Beachley Point (Gloucestershire) on the Severn on 19th, whilst perhaps the most unexpected bird of the month was a **Least Sandpiper** *Calidris minutilla* at Porthscatho from 9th (plates 145 & 146), found by observers looking for the King Eider there!

### Gulls and relatives

A further attraction in Cornwall was an elusive first-winter **Bonaparte's Gull** *Larus philadelphia* from about 8th at Drift Reservoir and Newlyn. There were also at least three **Ring-billed Gulls** *L. delawarensis* in Cornwall, with nine in Ireland, five in the Cardiff area (South Glamorgan), including three together at Roath Park Lake on 23rd, and one at Walney (Cumbria) on 17th. On the east side of England, an individual reappeared at Leigh-on-Sea (Essex) on 20th, and another joined the long-staying **Laughing Gull** *L. atricilla* (plate 119) taking bread at Newcastle General Hospital (Tyne & Wear) from 12th. It may be significant that all our **Ring-billed Gulls** seem to be getting old together, for, of these 20, only the Walney bird was reported as a first-winter. Will Ring-billed Gull numbers in Britain and Ireland decline in the way that those of another American species—the Ring-necked Duck—have done? News of Ireland's first **Franklin's Gull** *L. pipixcan*, at the North Bull (Co. Dublin) on 1st March, resulted in an

exodus of keen twitchers from the All-Ireland Conference taking place in Sligo. Good numbers of **Mediterranean Gulls** *L. melanocephalus* were reported, with at least seven in Norfolk and five in the Southend area: last month we noted an East-German-ringed individual in Cardiff, and now hear of a different first-winter at Chew Valley Lake (Avon) also in January and also sporting an East German ring, suggesting that this population is adopting the migration patterns of the local Black-headed Gulls *L. ridibundus*. There were large counts of **Herring Gulls** *L. argentatus* and **Great Black-backed Gulls** *L. marinus* at Sandwich on 1st, with 15,000 of the former and 8,400 of the latter. A **Herring Gull** of the race *argentatus* 'larger than *marinus*' was noted at a Cheltenham (Gloucestershire) rubbish tip on 4th, as well as an adult *micahellis* and an out-of-place adult **Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla*.

The **Ivory Gull** *Pagophila eburnea* at Saltburn (Cleveland) (plates 117 & 118) stayed to 8th, but the large northern gulls remained well below the par for recent winters, with 11 **Glaucous Gulls** *L. hyperboreus* at Killybegs (Co. Donegal) on 1st the only double-figure count of that species, and two **Iceland Gulls** *L. glaucoides* the largest count, also at Killybegs on 1st and at Rossaveil (Co. Galway) on 2nd.

The **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* remained at Holyhead, Anglesey (Gwynedd), to 6th, and **Pomarine Skuas** *Stercorarius pomarinus* continued to put in appearances down the English east coast, with up to five in the Thames Estuary (Essex/Kent), where there were also single **Arctic** *S. parasiticus* and **Great Skuas** *S. skua* early in the month.

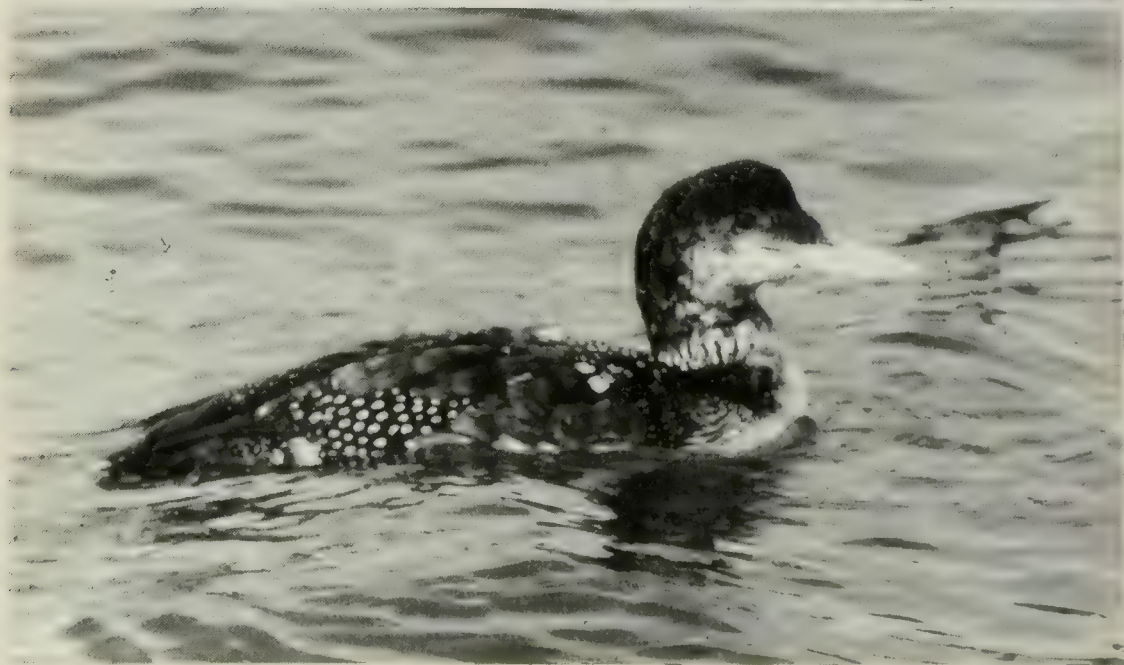
### Finches and buntings

The Redcar (Cleveland) **Serin** *Serinus serinus* and Carron Valley (Central) **Two-barred Crossbill** *Loxia leucoptera* remained in their respective wintering sites. Redcar also played host to a fine **Arctic Redpoll** *Carduelis hornemanni* from 11th for about a week. **Siskins** *C. spinus* remained in large numbers in Ireland and parts of western Britain, and **Bramblings** *Fringilla montifringilla*, though scattered, were generally in above average numbers, with 40 at Sandwich a good site count. A census of **Twites** *C. flavirostris* wintering around The Wash (Lincolnshire/Norfolk) suggested a population of some 20,000, whilst the same survey revealed unprecedented numbers of **Lapland Buntings** *Calcarius lapponicus*, some





147-149. White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*,  
Co. Down, February 1986 (above and right,  
*C. Douglas Deane*; below, *R. H. Thompson*)



400-500: other good counts were 40 at Holland Gap (Essex), 31 at Salhouse (Norfolk) and 15 at Sandwich. **Snow**

**Buntings** *Plectrophenax nivalis* remained very widespread in Ireland, with 700-800 still on the Foyle (Co. Londonderry) and 175 on The Mullet (Co. Mayo) on 1st, and, in Scotland, Foveran (Grampian) held up to 300 early in the month.



#### Odds-and-ends

A **Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* at Snettisham (Norfolk) on 27th was more unusual than the **Rough-legged Buzzard** *B. lagopus* there all month. Some dozen Rough-legs were reported in the east of Britain, from Bransdale (North Yorkshire) down to Suffolk, with, in the west, one at Ravenglass (Cumbria) on 25th. Two **Goshawks** *Accipiter gentilis*, mobbed by a Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*, were seen at Fen Drayton Gravel-pit (Cambridgeshire) on 9th. The only report of a **Gyr Falcon** *Falco rusticolus* was typically from the Northern Isles, on Fair Isle (Shetland). **Long-eared Owls** *Asio otus* showed

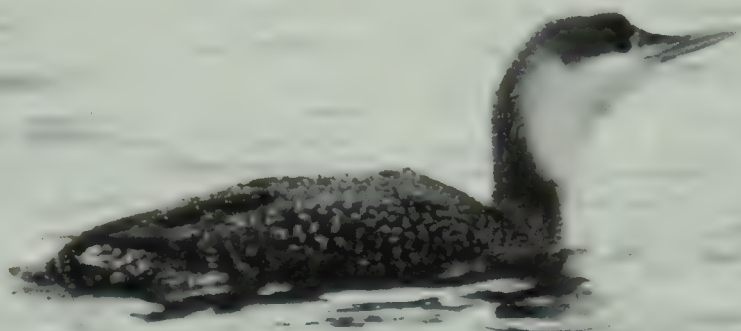
well in eastern England, and included a roost of 23 near Doncaster (South Yorkshire) on 30th January.

**Waxwings** *Bombycilla garrulus* remained more numerous than usual, with 30 at Sheringham (Norfolk), at least 32 at Guisborough (Cleveland), 12 each at Washington (Tyne & Wear) and Cramlington (Northumberland), 25 at Dundee (Tayside) and ten at Aberdeen (Grampian), and many ones and twos, mainly in Scotland and the northeast of England. By contrast, **Shore Larks** *Eremophila alpestris* were still few, up to 14 at Blakeney (Norfolk) being the only double-figure count, and **Great Grey Shrikes** *Lanius excubitor* were also scarce, only seven being reported. Two **Dippers** *Cinclus cinclus* of the black-bellied Continental nominate race were seen in Norfolk.

Finally, to whet our appetites for the spring migration, there were unseasonal reports of a **Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* at Balgownie (Grampian) on 9th, and a **Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus* near Stevenage (Hertfordshire) for a few days late in the month.



150. Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*, Kent, February 1986 (R. J. Chandler)





### Latest news

In early April, there were **Gyrfalcons** at Berry Head (Devon) and on the North Slob (Co. Wexford); **Bonaparte's Gulls** in Cardiff and on the North Slob; the **Least Sandpiper** was still to be seen at Porthscatho; and there was a **Dipper** of the black-bellied

Continental race on Fair Isle at the end of March. There was a mere trickle of summer visitors, apart from 200-300 **Wheatears** *Oenanthe oenanthe* at Portland Bill, where there was also a **Quail** *Coturnix coturnix* for three days in the first week of the month.

## Reviews

**Neotropical Ornithology.** Edited by P. A. Buckley, Mercedes S. Foster, Eugene S. Morton, Robert S. Ridgely and Francine C. Buckley. Ornithological Monographs No. 36. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, 1985, 1,044 pages; eight colour plates; eight black-and-white plates. \$70.00.

Though relatively few European birdwatchers will be able or lucky enough to enjoy the wealth of South American birdlife in person to any great degree, the fact remains that Neotropical birds are spectacular not just in their numbers and their plumages, but also in fundamental ways in their biology and ecology. This book contains 63 invited papers, from appropriate authors (ranging from world figures to post-graduate students), divided into sections on taxonomy, zoogeography, systematics, evolution, population ecology, behavioural ecology, biology and conservation, each several papers strong. Fascinating facts, intriguing theories and examples of sound biological science are plentiful. Though to some readers the title 'Is *Diglossa* (?Thraupinae) monophyletic?' might seem a bit starchy, others would find 'Going to extremes: why do Sanderlings migrate to the tropics' and 'Migratory shorebirds: resource depletion in the tropics' absorbing to say the least. Such variety is typical of the book as a whole; thus, to any ornithologist with a serious interest in birds world-wide, this becomes a most valuable compendium, opening many windows into the lives of tropical birds.

JIM FLEGG

**Seabirds: an identification guide.** By Peter Harrison. Revised edition. Croom Helm, London, 1985. 448 pages; 88 colour plates; 312 maps; many line-drawings. £19.95.

Many subscribers will already be familiar with *Seabirds*, voted the 'British Birds' Best Bird Book of the Year 1983. This revised edition contains 84 of the original 88 plates unchanged, and four new plates; of these latter, two have been expanded to include two recently discovered species, and the other new plates (28 & 29) are marked improvements. In view of this, it seems a pity that a few more of the less successful original plates were not also repainted.

Approximately 1-2% of the text has been updated, and many of the distribution maps have been revised. The typographical errors noted in the review of the first edition (*Brit. Birds* 76: 371-372) have been corrected. As mentioned in that review, there appears to have been a conflict of priorities in the treatment of certain species groups: plates 54 & 55 (skuas) for example, are so overcrowded as to be confusing, yet there are no illustrations of swimming or standing birds, and a full five plates are devoted to grebes.

In common with many such works, the book is not without its minor flaws, but for its comprehensiveness and generally superb standard Peter Harrison's *Seabirds* remains unequalled.

Owners of a copy of the first edition may find it difficult to justify spending almost £20 on this edition, but no serious birder can afford to be without a copy of this indispensable guide.

PAUL ARCHER

**Birds of the Sheffield Area including the North-east Peak District.** Edited by Jon Hornbuckle & David Herringshaw. Sheffield Bird Study Group & Sheffield City Libraries, Sheffield, 1985. 312 pages; 120 line drawings; over 100 maps. Hardback £11.95; paperback £8.95.

The recording area of the Sheffield Bird Study Group (SBSG) is only 1,200 km<sup>2</sup> in extent, but, lying at the boundary between upland and lowland Britain, it encompasses a wide variety of habitats, from the high plateaux of the southern Pennines (and the site of the famous Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda*) to the flood plains of the rivers Rother and Don. The SBSG was formed as recently as 1972, but has rapidly acquired a reputation for excellent local studies: it pioneered the Waterways Bird Survey in 1973, while its occasional journal, *The Magpie*, has been very well received (*Brit. Birds* 74: 402). This reputation will be more firmly established by the publication of *Birds of the Sheffield Area*.

The genesis of the book was a tetrad breeding-bird survey conducted during 1975-80; it was decided that, rather than being published in isolation, the results should be incorporated into a more comprehensive review of the regional avifauna. The review covers the period 1960 to 1984, with a few records from early 1985 where they are of special relevance.

An excellent introductory chapter elucidates the character of the region, with geology, physiography, climate and land-use displayed in great detail on the tetrad grids. Brief chapters are devoted to the history of ornithology in the area, visible migration studies, and changes in the avifauna during the period of the review (gains include both Goosander *Mergus merganser* and Red-breasted Merganser *M. serrator*, but Merlin *Falco columbarius*, Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix* and Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* have seriously declined).

The Classified List deals with 248 species in 230 pages (while 12 species not recorded since before 1960, and 20 species regarded as escapes are noted in appendices). This total, however, includes several species not yet formally accepted by the relevant records committee, and one—Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* in 1963—which was rejected by the Rarities Committee. Good use is made of Wildfowl Counts, CBC data and ringing returns. For most breeding species, a tetrad map is included and (following the lead of *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland*) a useful transparent overlay is provided, which enables a better interpretation of distributions in relation to environmental factors. Where the volume of data warrants, histograms are used to display the monthly distributions of scarcer visitors and migrants (though in one or two instances—for example, Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*—the figures in the diagrams appear to be at variance with statements in the text).

The standard of production and lay-out is generally high, though there is the seemingly inevitable handful of typographical errors, mainly in the scientific names of species. Unusually in a book of this kind, there are no photographs. A map of principal localities is included, however, and an excellent set of line-drawings (several full-page) depicts over 100 species, but it is a pity that something of the atmosphere of the region could not have been evoked by the inclusion of a few well-chosen photographs.

In recent years, new standards of excellence have been set by a number of regional avifaunas and this work unquestionably joins that select band. With only 230 members, the SBSG is to be congratulated upon producing such a worthwhile volume.

A. R. DEAN

**Handbuch der Vögel der Sowjetunion. Vol. 1. Erforschungsgeschichte, Gaviiformes, Podicipediformes, Procellariiformes.** Edited by V. D. Il'ichev and V. E. Flint. A. Ziemsen Verlag, Wittenberg Lutherstadt, 1985. 350 pages, 8 colour plates, 67 figures. DM 78.00.

The first of ten proposed volumes on the birds of the Soviet Union was published, in Russian, in 1982. This welcome translation (updated) into German will admit of a far wider readership. Since Dementiev & Gladkov's monumental and pioneering work appeared over 30 years ago, ornithology has come a long way. Similarities between that earlier treatise and the present work are few; this new handbook is right up to date.

The 200 pages of introductory matter fired my imagination. The first of three chapters is a potted history of ornithological research in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union: five main regions (European Russia, the Urals and West Siberia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia, Central and East Siberia, and the Far East) are further divided into 36 sub-regions, for each of



which we learn who has done what—and when—from Pallas (1768) onwards. Compulsive reading! Then follows an analysis of the current state of research, identifying the gaps (e.g. in the Central Asian plateaux); and finally a chronological list of the most important publications on USSR avifauna, from 1832 to 1984.

The divers, grebes and tubenoses, 28 species in all, are covered in 130 pages (from 14 for Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* to just over one page for Bonin Petrel *Pterodroma hypoleuca*). The texts, with much the same subject headings as *BWP* (though some sections are combined), give invaluable data on distribution and movements; they are informative on 'lesser-known' species such as Streaked Shearwater *Calonectris leucomelas* and Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis*, though for the 17 species found also in the West Palearctic more thorough treatment is available in *BWP* and Bauer & Glutz, both frequently acknowledged as reference sources. I was slightly surprised to read that the Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica*, rightly treated as separate from *G. arctica* (the two do not interbreed in the overlap zone), is indistinguishable in non-breeding plumages from Black-throated Diver; surely *pacifica* lacks the white flank patch of *arctica*?; but no mention is made of this useful field character under either species. The maps are more complete than any previous ones for this massive land area, but any interpretation of them should allow for the fact that there are still large gaps in the knowledge. Eight colour plates depict the birds, their downy young and their eggs. There are 13½ pages of references, to 1984.

Any serious student of Palearctic ornithology should acquire this handbook. The next volume due is vol. 4 (Galliformes, Gruiformes), in 1987.

DAVID A. CHRISTIE

**British Warblers.** By Eric Simms. Collins, London, 1985. 432 pages; six colour plates (by Ian Wallace); 44 black-and-white plates; 15 line-drawings and numerous maps and sonagrams. Hardback £20.00; paperback £9.95.

This is Eric Simms's third contribution to the highly acclaimed 'New Naturalist' series and keeps up the high standard now well established by the previous 70 volumes.

Three introductory chapters cover both Old World and New World warblers and summarise the British species, then the book soon settles into a series of chapters covering each of our breeding species fully, with shorter accounts of our rarer visitors. Eric Simms has obviously undertaken a very thorough literature search, as the bibliography lists over 1,000 references in several languages. Much of this reference material is dry and stuffy reading and it tests the skills of an author when it has to be sifted and summarised and presented in a more-readable fashion to the layman. In my opinion, he has done this admirably, and linked the whole thing together by injecting his personal experiences into the text, each account being full of concise facts and figures, juicy slices of personal narrative and liberally cross-referenced.

The author's personal interest in bird song comes across throughout the book and is mirrored by the numerous sonagrams and careful analysis of song and call transcriptions of each species. His interest in field identification of difficult species, however, is apparently only 'skin-deep', and little emphasis or discussion has been included in the accounts. Ian Wallace has contributed six colour plates, sadly depicting only the males of each species; I would have liked to have seen more plates, and perhaps a couple of chapters by Ian Wallace on the trickier elements of warbler identification: I am sure that this would have been a great asset to the book. Photographs could have been some compensation to get over the 'feel' of each species, but sadly, of the 24 photographs of birds, no less than 19 of them are of birds at the nest, where the character of each species is not shown to the best effect. More-thorough picture research could have turned up good photographs of almost all species away from the nest.

I found the lack of British distribution maps surprising; that, too, should have been an essential element of a work of this nature. Even the rarer visitors could have had their occurrences plotted, as done with Aquatic *Acrocephalus paludicola*, Melodious *Hippolais polyglotta* and Icterine Warblers *H. icterina* (incidentally the only British maps in the book).

These are minor quibbles about a book that I have thoroughly enjoyed reading; it has been a pleasure to dip into it when I have had the odd spare hour, and it is that sort of book; one to browse, or to read from cover to cover. The author and publisher are to be congratulated on yet another excellent volume for the series. I recommend *British Warblers* to all who wish to learn about 'this family of smaller species, abounding in numbers, and extremely interesting', as Jardine put it in 1839 (according to Eric Simms).

S. C. MADGE

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*Publishing Manager,  
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*Design*  
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## Addresses

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*Papers, notes, letters, drawings & photographs for publication* **Dr J. T. R. Sharrock**, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ

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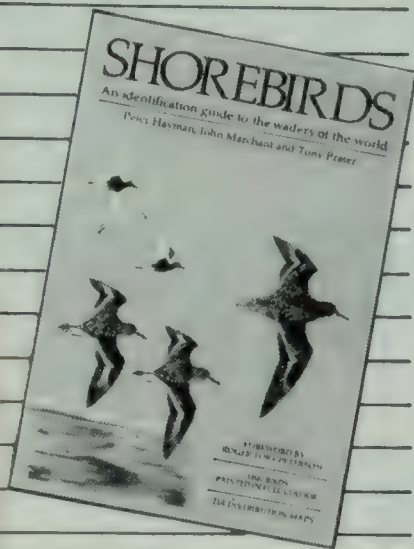
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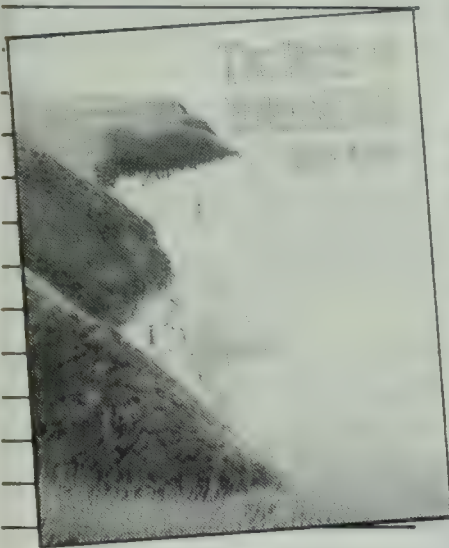
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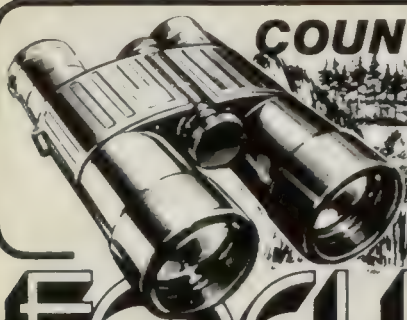
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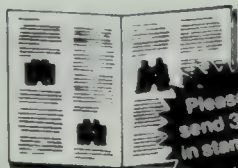
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VOLUME 79 NUMBER 6 JUNE 1986

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This is the tenth annual competition for 'Bird Photograph of the Year', and the sixth to be sponsored by Matthew Gloag and Son Ltd, proprietors of *The Famous Grouse* Scotch whisky.

151. Grey Partridges *Perdix perdix* dusting, West Midlands. April 1985 (A. T. Moffett) (Olympus OM1, 300 mm Zuiko lens. Kodachrome 64)







152. Female Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* displaying to its own reflection, Norfolk, April 1985 (J. D. Bakewell) (Olympus OM1. Tamron 90 mm Macro lens. Novoflex macroflash guns. Kodachrome 64)

153. Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* at dead Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Worcestershire, January 1985 (Mike Wilkes) (Olympus OM2. 70-210 zoom. Braun F700 flashgun with two heads. Kodachrome 64)





- 1st BIRD PHOTOGRAPH OF THE YEAR 1986 Grey Partridges *Perdix perdix* dusting, by A. T. Moffett (plate 151)
- 2nd Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* at dead Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, by Mike Wilkes (plate 153)
- 3rd Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* displaying to its own reflection, by J. D. Bakewell (plate 152)
- 4th Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa* dusting, by A. T. Moffett (plate 154)
- 5th Treecreepers *Certhia familiaris* reacting at nest-site, by Alan Barnes (plate 155)
- 6th Grey Partridge by C. R. Knights
- 7th Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* hovering, by Hans Schouten
- 8th Mallards *Anas platyrhynchos* copulating, by Richard T. Mills
- 9th Buzzards *Buteo buteo* at nest, by Colin Carver.
- 10th Blackbird *Turdus merula*, by Colin Carver
- 11th Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* removing egg from nest, by M. B. Withers
- 12th Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* singing, by Ernie Janes
- 13th Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* displaying, by Gordon Langsbury
- 14th Mallard retrieving nest material stolen by nearby Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*, by Mike Wilkes
- 15th Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*, by Paul van der Poel
- 16th Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*, by Tim Loseby
- 17th Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* singing, by P. Munsterman
- 18th Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* fishing, by Roger Tidman
- 19th Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* displaying at photographer, by Dennis Green
- 20th Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* at colony, by Roger Wilmshurst
- 21st Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, by Paul Doherty

The general standard of photographic excellence achieved seems to improve every year. The top five or six photographs have always been superb, but we have now reached the position that no less than 41 transparencies were selected for our initial shortlist, and we could whittle

154. Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa* dusting, West Midlands, April 1985 (A. T. Moffett)  
(Olympus OM1. 300 mm Zuiko lens. Kodachrome 64)





155. Pair of Treecreepers *Certhia familiaris* reacting at nest-site, Sussex, June 1985 (A. P. Barnes) (Olympus OM1, Tamron 300 mm lens, Two Sunpak flash units, Kodachrome 64)





this down to 21 only after a further hour of discussion. As usual, the final placings are the result of a paper vote by the four judges. We have commented on this 'strength in depth' on previous occasions, but wish to stress it again, for bird photography in colour is clearly thriving, thanks to the excellent equipment now available, and the expertise of today's bird-photographers, who have built on the experience of previous generations. Another satisfactory trend is that the proportion of photographs taken away from the nest is still increasing. The rules of this competition state that, as well as technical excellence, aesthetic appeal and artistic composition, entries will be judged on originality and scientific interest; we are, therefore, always looking especially for action shots showing interesting behaviour, although a portrait showing the bird particularly well within its habitat can also be just as 'scientifically interesting' and informative.

The standard was so high that we wish to repeat that any photographer whose work reached even the first shortlist of 41 (let alone the final 21 already listed) deserves congratulations. The initial 41 included 12 additional photographers: Dennis Bright, Dr Kevin Carlson, David M. Cottridge (winner in 1983), David J. Garner, R. Glover, Tony Hamblin, S. J. Hingston, Harry Lehto, J. Lawton Roberts (winner in 1984), Peter Smith, J. G. Snowball and Steve Young.

Most photographers submitted three transparencies (the maximum number permitted by the rules), and two entrants deserve special mention since all three of their entries were selected in the initial short-listing: this consistency of top-class work was achieved by our 1986 winner, A. T. Moffett, and our 1977 winner, Mike Wilkes. Only three photographers managed to get two of their three photographs included in the final shortlist: Colin Carver, A. T. Moffett (again!) and Mike Wilkes (again!).

Our winning photograph this year meets all the criteria of the competition's rules equally. A. T. Moffett, who, over recent years, has photographed birds sunning with conspicuous success, concentrated in 1985 on attempting to photograph birds dusting. His results are stunningly successful, and also show a rarely photographed feature of bird behaviour. We believe the best of these photographs is a delightful shot of two Grey Partridges dusting (plate 151). The composition is exactly right, the birds being 'well balanced' within the picture, and both looking at the camera; and the colours are a delight. But, most importantly, we see both partridges dug-in to the soft, dusty earth as they indulge in this curious form of feather care, introducing the soft earth into their plumage.

The success of this series of photographs is demonstrated by the fact that we also placed fourth another of A. T. Moffett's shots, a Red-legged Partridge also dusting (plate 154). This bird has dug itself surprisingly deeply into the soft soil. We are delighted that Mr Moffett's meticulous preparations and patience — revealed by his success in the past with sunning Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* (4th in 1982, *Brit. Birds* 75: plate 68), sunning Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* and Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* (6th in 1982 and 8th in 1983) and singing Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* (3rd in 1983, *Brit. Birds* 76: plate 89, and now well known through its use in the ZEISS West Germany advertisements for 10×40 binoculars)—have



now been rewarded with our top prize.

The runner-up, M. C. Wilkes, was our winner in 1977 with a Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* at a woodland pool (*Brit. Birds* 70: plate 25), was runner-up in 1981 (with a pair of Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, *Brit. Birds* 74: plate 132) and was placed third in both 1979 (with a Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, *Brit. Birds* 72: plate 105) and 1984 (Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, *Brit. Birds* 77: plate 55). His photograph this year is of a Water Rail coming to feed at a dead Moorhen (plate 153). This sums up the problems which birds have in winter: freezing conditions making feeding difficult, so that the most opportunistic and catholic feeders survive. In fact, the Moorhen was a traffic casualty, placed by Mike Wilkes to attract a feeding Water Rail, but the picture achieves the planned effect brilliantly and this planning and preparation by a bird-photographer is wholly justified in our view (provided, as in this case, that an honest account is given of the circumstances). The colour and composition, with the faded winter reeds forming a back-drop, complete the picture.

The third place goes to J. D. Bakewell, for a most original photograph of a displaying female Goldcrest (plate 152). This bird was observed regularly, at the same time each morning, displaying, with crest raised, to its own reflection in a garage window. The bird was photographed from inside the window, illumination of both bird and background being with well-handled flash.

Placed fifth was a most attractive shot of a pair of Treecreepers at the nest (plate 155)—one of the few nest-photographs in our shortlist. A. P. Barnes photographed these, when both parents returned simultaneously to feed their young. Both seemed surprised to find the other present and tried to feed each other—instead of their nestlings—before flying off. Moments later, they returned, singly, going straight in to the nest hole to feed their young.

The 18 photographers whose work was short-listed will be invited to attend the Press Reception in London at which the award is made to the winner. A short report on this will appear in 'News and comment' in due course.

We must stress yet again that the standard is so high that no-one who entered this year should be discouraged if they did not reach the shortlist. The day's judging is one of the highlights of our lives—seeing so many stunning bird-photographs, the cream of the dedicated work by many of the world's most expert amateur and professional bird-photographers. We hope that all this year's entrants will again submit their work for our 1987 competition.

Finally, we must once more remind photographers of the legal requirements of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), and that the welfare of the birds must always be put first.

R. J. CHANDLER, ERIC HOSKING, J. T. R. SHARROCK and DON SMITH

# Development of snail-smashing by Song Thrushes



*C. J. Henty*

**T**he note on snail-smashing by a previously inexperienced Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* (Herring 1984) prompted me to summarise some observations made on hand-reared birds, mostly during 1961, as part of my doctorate project (Henty 1965), but not otherwise published previously.

## Experimental methods

The idea was to present some individuals of a brood with hard objects, including snails (adults of the medium-sized brown *Arianta arbustorum*), and follow how their behaviour developed day by day until a snail had been smashed. One or more of the others in the brood which had also been given similar spells in the test situation, but no access to any hard objects, were then given snails in order to see whether preliminary 'practice' really was necessary or whether the naïve birds could (at the right age) smash a snail in spite of having had no previous relevant experience.

Some initial tests had shown that newly fledged Song Thrushes presented with small flattish pebbles and spills of wood would perform the typical smashing behaviour. In the main experiments, therefore, a third type of early experience was studied by giving some birds these objects, but no snails: a type of partial deprivation. Throughout the period of the main experiments, the thrushes were kept together in broods in canary cages, with a wire floor so that dried faecal pellets were not accessible as hard objects. Similarly, the food was inspected, and berries or hard lumps removed. By opening a sliding partition, the bird chosen for a test could be gently ushered into a test cage which had a floor of soft sacking folded several times. Besides the appropriate test items, the test cage also had permanent furniture consisting of four units: two were hard 'anvils' made from tiles of the same area ( $6 \times 6$  cm) but of different heights (1.1 cm and 2.5 cm, though this turned out to be unimportant). I was interested in how thrushes might develop the recognition of anvils, so included two soft 'anvils' made from sacking, but mimicking the hard anvils in size and colour. The positions of all four were varied amongst tests at random. Usually, a particular bird would have two tests per day, but the exact



number depended on circumstances. A bird's response was quite self-determined and was very unpredictable. If no response occurred within five minutes, a test was ended; if there was some smashing behaviour, a test ended when 30 seconds elapsed without response. The naïve birds were given five-minute tests with anvils, but no objects. Due to hand-rearing, the young thrushes were quite tame, so I made records seated in full view. Initially, I used a tape recorder, but soon developed a shorthand system that noted every occurrence of the behaviour types mentioned below.

### **Basic responses and their development over time**

Snails, pebbles and wood spills were all treated in a similar fashion. Simple pecking was quite common; alternatively, the bird would grip the object and then lift it. Often, the object was then just carried or dropped immediately, but otherwise it might be flicked (in mid air, bird in normal standing position) or actually hit on the ground by lowering the head and crouching slightly. Rarely, a hard, snail-sized object was shaken in mid air or vibrated on the ground. Testing was started when a brood showed consistent exploratory pecking, eight or nine days after fledging. The three birds whose tests included snails took nine, 24 and 25 days before a snail was broken; four more individuals in less-well-controlled pilot experiments the year before (1960) took 15 to 22 days. A major reason for the slow development is that, given a choice, much of the early smashing behaviour is directed to the pebbles and wood spills which are more easy to grip and lift. Thus, the thrushes largely develop an efficient response with inanimate objects in 13 days or less, and eventually transfer this to snails. The primary development of smashing behaviour is similar for birds given hard objects, whether or not snails are included; this section uses information from all such birds. The general level of interest in hard objects can be measured by taking pecking and lifting together, and this does not vary systematically from day to day. Lifting, however, steadily replaces pecking as the main initial response, rising on average from 35% to 60%. Once lifted, the number of smashing responses performed before the object is dropped rises steadily, from 1 to 4.5 just before a snail is actually broken. At the start, flicking is the main response compared with hits (at 51%), but hits steadily become the dominant behaviour, ending at 94%. Few of the early hits (6%) are directed to the hard anvils, but this rises to a mean of 66%. Thus, over a period of one to two weeks, the choice and persistence of relevant responses changes in at least four ways, so that, finally, a snail would be very likely to be broken if it were to be chosen as an object of attention. Two observations on newly fledged wild thrushes suggest that the artificial situation is not misleading. C. S. Elton FRS (*in litt.*) saw a large *Helix aspersa* being hit but not smashed, whilst G. Lewis (*in litt.*) noted smashing behaviour being applied to the split and almost empty husks of the conkers of horse chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*. These seem to be the only developmental observations on young thrushes in the wild.

### **Behaviour of naïve birds at first test**

The changes with time, described above, naturally suggest, but do not

prove, that a young Song Thrush needs extensive practice before being able to smash snails. The critical test, however, is the response of their brood mates that have not had such practice. Three such naïve birds were presented only with a snail, and all succeeded in breaking it first time, as did a bird in the pilot experiment whose environment was not so well screened for accidental objects. Another naïve individual was tested with snail, pebble and wood spill, and directed most of its response to the pebble, so that, although its behaviour was well organised, it did not break a snail first time, but only in another test when undistracted by other objects.

Thus, the supposed practice is not in fact essential. The inexperienced birds are, however, not exactly the same, since only 35% of their hits are directed to the hard anvils ( $P = 0.012$ , Mann Whitney) and they show more of the ineffective flicks, though this is not statistically reliable. There are strong indications that some of the fledglings learn to use the hard anvils during the course of their very first test. When tested with inedible hard objects, these birds initially responded vigorously, but the response rapidly wanes. It seems that a few rewarded performances with real snails enables Song Thrushes quickly to ignore other hittable objects. Interestingly enough, the results from the group with partial deprivation show that extensive experience with pebbles and wood spills inhibits first response to a snail—the general level of smashing behaviour has become depressed—and several tests with snails are needed before the response recovers sufficiently to be effective. Even after young thrushes have smashed and eaten many snails, they will respond to novel hard objects of the right size, for example a collar stud or a wood spill painted a new colour; this interest is, however, very shortlived.

### Other observations

I did a few tests to determine the stimulus characteristics that elicit smashing responses. Broken shells are hit in the normal way, but small pieces of shell are mandibulated, as are large pieces of india-rubber and mealworms. A floppy piece of fabric several centimetres square was shaken. Thus, to be treated as a snail, an object has to be both hard and of a certain size (probably too large to be swallowed whole). One young thrush which had suffered a severe gut infection, associated with white panels in its flight feathers, showed a most aberrant response. It ignored hard objects, but, after having eaten mealworms normally for 16 days, it suddenly started to smash them for up to 15 minutes at a time, so that the prey was reduced to a shred of chitin. After three days, it started to hit the mealworm on the hard anvils, and the next day pecked at and occasionally lifted a snail whilst it was carrying a mealworm. In the next test, it broke and ate a snail, and never smashed mealworms again. In this case, the behavioural actions were normal, but the selection of objects highly unusual.

### Discussion, and the responses of Blackbirds

In his note, Herring (1984) described a case very similar to my naïve birds, but did imply that social example is the only relevant previous experience. This overlooks the possible role of individual trial-and-error. My



experiments showed, in fact, that practice has only a marginal effect, but it could well be that the noticeable pecking and pulling at anvils and other cage fixtures gives a bird information about the relative hardness of the substrate which could help direct the response when first tested with a snail. Similarly, the general use of the bill in feeding and exploratory pecking could help a bird to direct its bill to the lip of a snail, which the naïves did just as well as more experienced individuals. It should be noted that the observations of Haviland & Pitt (1919) are quite consistent with my results for 'experienced' birds, but their conclusion that learning must be involved is just not tenable on logical grounds.

I made some tests with three young Blackbirds *T. merula*, which showed all the responses of the Song Thrushes, but only as isolated, non-persistent, actions (except for pecking, which was by far the major reaction to a pebble or an intact snail). The Blackbirds readily swallowed the bodies of snails removed from their shells, and with half-broken shells lifted them and got at much of the body through a combination of hits, flicks and shakes. Snails with 5-mm to 10-mm diameter holes in the shell that exposed the body were mainly pecked, with rare bouts of hitting, so that, although after a long time most of the body had been eaten, the original hole had not been obviously enlarged. Interspersed tests with intact, crawling snails showed that the Blackbirds still only pecked at them briefly. Two of the Blackbirds were later kept together with Song Thrushes that were breaking snails. The Blackbirds watched and would rob the thrushes, but this did not alter their own response to intact snails. Basically, Blackbirds have the appropriate repertoire of actions, but do not persevere and link hits into sequences that are long enough to be effective.

There are—very rarely—reports of Blackbirds breaking snails (Butlin 1959; Vere-Benson 1963), but very few species apart from the Song Thrush regularly do it, even though it is apparently a good source of food, available in drought and frost. Exceptions to this are the Himalayan *Myiophoneus caeruleus* and Malabar Whistling Thrushes *M. horsfieldi* (Sálim Ali 1949, 1953), a bower bird, the Tooth-billed Catbird *Scenopoeetes dentirostris* (Marshall 1954), and the Noisy Pitta *Pitta versicolor* (Cayley 1959). There is no reason to suppose that breaking snails imposes any special limitation on the Song Thrush, since no marked morphological specialisation is involved. There could possibly be some other form of disadvantage to explain why so few species have evolved an apparently simple behavioural performance. In nature, the sound of a thrush breaking a snail can be heard for some distance, and in many woods there are very few anvils, so a bird must return regularly to a small number of sites. This could make Song Thrushes more detectable by predators, and more easily ambushed. Morris (1954) noted that a pair of Song Thrushes used anvils remote from the nest whilst the young were there: this suggests that predators may be attracted to anvils. Both in England and on the Continent, there is some evidence that Song Thrushes are caught by Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus* more readily than are Blackbirds (Owen 1932; Tinbergen 1946). The evidence is thin, but at least consistent with selection pressures being exerted by nest-predators and other predators on birds that break snails by hitting them on anvils.

This study also highlights the inadequacy of calling types of behaviour 'innate' or 'learnt'. The basic actions do not depend on practice, nor the selection of hard objects, but there is reason to suppose that experience plays a role in the selection of hard anvils, whilst the final discrimination of snails seems to be a case of operant (as distinct from Pavlovian) learning being guided by food reward. Thus, in the normal development of snail-smashing by Song Thrushes, there is an interplay of inherent influences with influences of traditional learning. Lorenz's idea (1966) of the 'innate school marm' seems appropriate in this example: any animal that innately picks up large hard objects in the environment, perseveratively (repeatedly) hits them on the ground, prefers the feedback from hard surfaces, and prefers doing the behaviour to items that provide food, is inevitably going to be a self-taught breaker of snails.

My thrushes were then engaged in hunting for snails in an aviary, and were afterwards released into the wild.

### Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to my supervisor, Professor N. Tinbergen FRS, and to Professor A. C. Hardy FRS, for use of facilities in the Department of Zoology, Oxford. The then Nature Conservancy granted me support in the form of a research studentship.

### Summary

This paper describes and interprets observations, made in 1961, of young Song Thrushes *Turdus philomelos* in controlled conditions, to study the mechanism of the development of the species' habit of breaking open snail shells by smashing them against a hard object ('anvil'). Fledglings gradually develop an effective performance when given repeated tests with snails. Naïve individuals, however, that have never seen any suitable hard objects, will nevertheless break a snail the first time if this test occurs several weeks after fledging.

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C. J. Henty, Department of Psychology, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA



# Product reports

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Items included in this feature have been submitted by the manufacturers or their agents. The reviews are the personal opinions of the reviewers; they are not the result of technical tests, but are assessments made after use in appropriate conditions (e.g. in the field). Neither *British Birds* nor the individual reviewers can accept responsibility for any adverse consequences of opinions stated, and items are accepted for review on this understanding. We aim, however, to be helpful both to our readers and to the manufacturers of goods used by birdwatchers. EDS

## **Zeiss West Germany 7×42B/GAT\* binoculars**

Crystal-clear, whether on an icy, foggy Bedfordshire winter day or in the humid heat of Thailand. A magnificent binocular! The enormous field of view will be especially welcomed by all spectacle-wearers. Surprisingly, I never found the 7× magnification a disadvantage compared with my usual 10×, perhaps because of the exceptional brightness and clarity of the image of the 7×42. This is one of the range of top models from which anyone able to afford the best will inevitably choose (the usual retail price is just over £350). There are only two or three very minor 'niggles'. Whereas the Zeiss 10×40—with internal focusing—focuses without the eyepieces extending towards one's eyes, this 7×42 model does so in the way of traditional binoculars (disconcerting for a day or so to someone used to ramming binoculars against spectacle lenses). The focusing wheel is well placed, and nicely proportioned, so that it can be located instantly even with a gloved hand, and is far enough away from the eyepiece that it does not fall beneath the rim of a hat or peak of a cap; nevertheless a slightly wider wheel would be an improvement.

Having used 1-kg *Ross* 10×50 binoculars in my early birdwatching years, weight seldom concerns me, but, for the record, these weigh 857 g. They balance well in the hand, and hang easily when not in use. There are splendidly clear instructions on how to fit the strap to the binoculars and the rainguard, but the webbed strap supplied is rather thin (cutting into a bare neck). The rainguard itself fits excellently over the eye-pieces, even when the binocular is opened out for a wide-eyed person. A first-rate leather case is supplied. The objective lenses are well inset, providing good protection against rain, sun-glare and—to some extent—accidental impact.

The wide field of view is particularly useful in confined habitats, such as woodland or forest, and for seawatching or raptor-watching: on any occasion when a small object needs to be located against a relatively large or uniform background, such as leaves, sea or sky. The depth of field which remains in focus is also greater than usual with some popular makes and models, especially helpful with a flying bird or one at an indeterminate range in undergrowth. It is possible to focus down as closely as 4 m: a boon whenever a really tame bird is encountered.

All-in-all, these are magnificent binoculars of the very highest quality, ideal for birdwatching in all conditions. I cannot recommend them too strongly.

J. T. R. SHARROCK

[If any reader would like further details of this product, please send a SAE to Sandra Barnes, BB Advertising, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.]

# Mystery photographs



**114** The warbler in last month's puzzle (plate 140, repeated here) has several eye-catching features. The supercilium is short and pointed, and there is a broad pale crescent below the eye: the pattern is distinctive, and could be shown only by Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* or one of the *Locustella* warblers. The tail is short and stumpy, with long undertail-

**157.** River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*, West Germany, May 1985 (Norbert Hofmann)







158. Mystery photograph 115. Identify the species. Answer next month

coverts, a good point in favour of *Locustella*. We can actually see the diagnostic feature of a *Locustella* tail: the outermost tail feather falls well short of the undertail-coverts. The outer web of the outermost primary is fringed whitish, also a feature of *Locustella*, but not of Cetti's Warbler. This helpful last point is admittedly difficult to see here, but, in any case, Cetti's can also be eliminated by those very large and obvious pale tips on the undertail-coverts.

The lack of obvious streaks on the head, and the lack of white tips on the tail feathers, narrow down the choice among the *Locustella* warblers. In fact, the boldness of the whitish tips on the undertail-coverts is a diagnostic feature of only one species: River Warbler *L. fluviatilis*. Savi's Warbler *L. luscinioides* has plain or less strongly pale-tipped undertail-coverts (see *Brit. Birds* 76: 81-82; 77: 205). This River Warbler was photographed by Norbert Hofmann in West Germany in May 1985. His second photograph (plate 157) shows the typical large-winged look of *Locustella*, and properly shows the white-fringed outer primary, as well as the species' diagnostic fine streaking on the lower throat and upper breast. The streaking can be difficult to see at times, so the prominent undertail-coverts spotting is a very useful supporting character, which is often not difficult to see because of the species' habitual, 'nervous' tail-cocking.

PJG

## European news

**T**his nineteenth six-monthly selection includes contributions from 22 countries. The official correspondents whose detailed six-monthly reports are summarised in this feature are acknowledged at the end of this

contribution. This feature is intended as a news service; anyone requiring further information or quoting records in other publications should refer to the literature of the relevant country. If you have made observations in any of the countries included here and do not know to whom records should be sent, we suggest that you send a copy to the relevant 'European news' correspondent listed at the end of this summary, who will pass your records on to the correct person.

Records awaiting formal verification by national rarities committees are indicated by an asterisk(\*).

### Unless otherwise stated, all records refer to single individuals

**Red-throated Diver** *Gavia stellata* HUNGARY Small invasion: nine records during 20th October to 1st December 1985, including two groups of three, eight of nine records on Danube near Budapest.

**White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* DENMARK High number: 15 adults migrating past Skagen during May 1985. YUGOSLAVIA Second record: inland on Ptuj Lake on 23rd January 1986.

**Black-browed Albatross** *Diomedea melanophris* DENMARK Deletion: September 1983 record (*Brit. Birds* 77: 233) rejected by Danish rarities committee.

**Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris diomedea* NORWAY First record: Vestfold on 19th October 1983.

**Sooty Shearwater** *Puffinus griseus* FINLAND First record: frozen to ice on Juurusvesi Lake on 28th November 1985, released, but subsequently died. SWEDEN Highest-ever total: 224 in 1984 (previous maximum 133 in 1983) (cf. high number in Denmark, *Brit. Birds* 78: 338).

**Wilson's Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus* FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY Second record: dead on road near Geislingen, Baden-Württemberg, on date not yet notified.

NORWAY First record in Norwegian recording area: landed on ship west of Spitsbergen on 25th November 1980.

**Storm Petrel** *Hydrobates pelagicus* MOROCCO First probable breeding: breeding calls heard at Punta Ceres in Strait of Gibraltar in June 1984 and 1985 (present in area throughout year, but breeding never proved).

**Gannet** *Sula bassana* SWEDEN High numbers: 9,490 in 1984 (total of only 8,790 in 1974-83).

**Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* LUXEMBOURG Breeding hint: 'decidedly immature' individual on River Sûre on 17th August 1985, perhaps from lakes of nearby Lorraine (no breeding record for Luxembourg) (cf. increased passage numbers, *Brit. Birds* 78: 338).

**Shag** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* POLAND Fifth to seventh records: two at Sarbinowo on 28th January 1985, immature at Władysławowo on 11th March 1985 and immature at Rewa on 21st-22nd August 1985 (first record was in February 1979, *Brit. Birds* 75: 25).

**Darter** *Anhinga melanogaster* MOROCCO First record: Merja Zerga lagoon on 8th August 1985 (previous claim, near Sidi Ifni in September 1979, not yet verified).

**White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* ROMANIA Breeding population: about 2,000 pairs in Danube Delta in 1985 (cf. 2,500 pairs in 1981, *Brit. Birds* 75: 25).

**Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus* ROMANIA Breeding population: only one small colony: 100 nestlings in 1985; also some isolated pairs (cf. about 200 pairs in three colonies in 1981, *Brit. Birds* 75: 25).

**Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* NORWAY Sixth record: Nord-Trøndelag on 18th May 1983.

**Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* ITALY First breeding record: pair at Molentargius Marsh, Sardinia, in June 1985.

**Western Reef Heron** *Egretta gularis* GREECE Third record: dark-phase in Porto Lagos on 2nd May 1985 (first and second records were in August 1982 and August 1983, *Brit. Birds* 77: 233, 78: 338; note other recent records in Austria, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Morocco and Switzerland, *Brit. Birds* 77: 586, 78: 639).

**Great White Egret** *Egretta alba* FRANCE Increasing: up to 40 in Camargue during winter 1985/86; many records from almost all regions; now removed from list of species considered by French rarities committee. MOROCCO First winter record: Merja Zerga lagoon on 26th January 1986 (previous records: 22 in spring and four in autumn).

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* MOROCCO Second breeding record: two nests on old kasba at Ouarzazate dam on 5th April 1985 (previous



breeding at same site, but in a tree, in spring 1984, *Brit. Birds* 78: 639).

**Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* NORWAY  
Seventh record: Trondheim on 23rd July 1983.

**White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia* DENMARK Decline continuing: 19 breeding pairs reared 21 young in 1984; 14 pairs reared 34 young in 1985 (cf. 31 pairs in 1979, 25 in 1980 and 1981, and 20 in 1982, *Brit. Birds* 74: 260, 76: 273).

**Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* ITALY Increased breeding: five pairs in Sardinia, and single pairs in Emilia Romagna and Apulia. ROMANIA Breeding population: about 800 pairs in Danube Delta in 1985 (cf. 'only about 4,000 pairs in nine colonies' in 1981, *Brit. Birds* 75: 25).

**Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* FINLAND Fifth record: Kuhmo on 14th October 1985 (previous records in 1975, 1978, 1979 and 1984, *Brit. Birds* 73: 257, 77: 587). ROMANIA Serious decline: now rare to see even a single in Danube Delta, although there could still be a very small colony surviving somewhere (cf. one colony of 20 pairs known in 1981, *Brit. Birds* 75: 25).

**Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus ruber* GREECE Largest-ever number: 2,465 on 14th-15th January 1986 (2,085 at one site).

**Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis* FAEROE ISLANDS First breeding record: four juveniles reared on Sandø in 1985.

**Brent Goose** *Branta bernicla* DENMARK Evidence of good breeding season: several counts in autumn 1985 showed 80-85% first-years.

**Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* MOROCCO Largest-ever winter flocks: 339 at Khnifiss lagoon on 19th November 1985 and 908 at Oued Saquiat-Al-Hamra at Layoun on 12th December 1985.

**Baikal Teal** *Anas formosa* NORWAY Second record (first accepted for 'A-list'): second-year male found dead on Spitsbergen on 9th June 1983 (cf. first Spanish record in January 1983 and eighth French record in March 1983, *Brit. Birds* 76: 567, 78: 639).

**Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* FAEROE ISLANDS Vagrant: adult female on 1st November 1973 (previously identified as Cinnamon Teal *A. cyanoptera*).

**King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis* FAEROE ISLANDS Eleventh record: Vestmannasund on 1st July 1984. SWEDEN High number: flock of 21 at Gotland in mid February 1986.

**Steller's Eider** *Polysticta stelleri* DENMARK Large flock: 13 (four males, nine females) around Bornholm in February-March 1985.

**Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis* FRANCE Influx: in autumn and winter 1985/86 (e.g. up to ten in Camargue, and flock of 25 on Morbihan coast). HUNGARY Influx: 12 records of one to eight near Budapest from 6th December 1985 to 13th February 1986.

**Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca* FRANCE Large influx inland: in autumn 1985 (e.g. up to 35 on gravel-pit in Seine-et-Marne, and about 180 in Alsace). HUNGARY Unusual influx: 14 records of flocks of up to 80 on Danube near Budapest from 16th November 1985 to 25th January 1986.

**Bufflehead** *Bucephala albeola* NETHERLANDS First record: near Cuyck, Noord-Brabant, from 18th February 1986 (only other European vagrant records since 1977 were in France in March 1980 and in the Western Isles, Scotland, also in March 1980, *Brit. Birds* 74: 464, 75: 26).

**White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala* POLAND Fourth record: pair on River Vistula near Koszyce on 12th January 1985.

**White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* CZECHOSLOVAKIA Second twentieth-century breeding attempt: Třeboň pond basin, Bohemia, in 1985: as in 1984, *Brit. Birds* 78: 340, eggs again unfertilised (cf. increases in Estonian SSR, Finland and Norway, *Brit. Birds* 78: 340, 640).

**Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus* DENMARK Second record: Gjerrild on 22nd-23rd May and Skagen on 24th-25th May (first record was in spring 1858). MOROCCO Fourth confirmed breeding since 1950s: young in nest south of Taroudant in May 1985.

**Short-toed Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus* FINLAND Fourth record: Inkoo on 30th June 1985 (first three were in October 1979, August 1980 and April 1984, *Brit. Birds* 73: 258, 74: 260, 78: 340).

**Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus* FAEROE ISLANDS Second record: juvenile found dead near Tórshavn around February 1980.

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY Vagrant: Ismaninger Teichgebiet, Bavaria, on 27th March 1983\*.

**Rough-legged Buzzard** *Buteo lagopus* FRANCE Influx: in autumn and winter 1985/86, from mid October, mainly in east, but west to Vendée.

**Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Aquila pomarina* NORWAY First record: subadult in Vestfold on 23rd September 1983.

**Tawny Eagle** *Aquila rapax* MOROCCO Second record in Rif Mountains since 1950s: Jbel Bourfi near Al-Hoceima on 1st June 1985 (species rapidly declined and now occurs regularly only south of High Atlas).

**Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* DENMARK Ninth record: immature on Skagen on 3rd June 1985. ESTONIAN SSR First record: adult of western race *A. h. adalberti* in Kohtla-Järve on 16th August 1985\*.

**Eleonora's Falcon** *Falco eleonora* FRANCE Deletion: 1984 breeding record (*Brit. Birds* 78: 640) should be deleted.

**Capercaillie** *Tetrao urogallus* FINLAND Steep decline: present population of about 135,000 'pairs' (females outnumber males by 1.5 to 1) is only half of that of 1940s.

**Double-spurred Francolin** *Francolinus bicalcaratus* MOROCCO Population increase: following creation of 'hunting reserves' some years ago, now frequently encountered around Sidi-Bettache and Sidi-Yahya des Zaërs.

**Crested Coot** *Fulica cristata* MOROCCO Records far south of breeding range: two at Khnifiss lagoon in November 1985 and one in December 1985.

**Crane** *Grus grus* FINLAND Census: 3,500 pairs and 'a few thousand' non-breeding individuals in summer 1983.

**Demoiselle Crane** *Anthropoides virgo* DENMARK Fourth record: two departed from Skagen towards Sweden on 30th May 1985.

**Little Bustard** *Tetrax tetrax* NETHERLANDS Second record since 1959: male at Nijkerk, Gelderland, during 18th-20th January 1986.

**Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni* FRANCE Sixth and seventh records: Vendée during 23rd August to 6th September 1985\* and Saône-et-Loire during 30th September to 6th October 1985\* (fifth was in November 1982, *Brit. Birds* 76: 274).

**Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus* CZECHOSLOVAKIA Third twentieth-century breeding record: Jeseníky Mountains, Moravia, in 1985 (previous records in Krkonoše Mountains, Bohemia, in 1903 and 1946) (cf. first-ever breeding records from Pyrénées and Italian Alps, *Brit. Birds* 76: 274, 78: 341-342).

**Sociable Plover** *Chettusia gregaria* CZECHOSLOVAKIA Fifth record: Louny, Bohemia, on 12th April 1985 (fourth record was in March 1981, *Brit. Birds* 75: 269).

**White-tailed Plover** *Chettusia leucura* FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY First record: Dummersee, Lower Saxony, on 16th July 1985\* (cf. 1975-84 records in Austria, Great Britain, Italy, Morocco, the Netherlands, Romania and Sweden, *Brit. Birds* 70: 465-471, 71: 584, 73: 506-507, 77: 588, 78: 545, 641).

**Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* DENMARK Good autumn passage in 1985 (e.g. up to 610 at Basnaes nor in mid September).

**White-rumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis* FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY Second record: adult at Salzderhilden, Lower Saxony, on 30th-31st May 1985\*.

**Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos* POLAND Fourth record: Turawa Reservoir on 26th August 1984. PORTUGAL Second record: Alvor Estuary, Algarve, on 13th September 1985.

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY Sixth record: immature at Salzgitter-Heerte, Lower Saxony, on 3rd-4th September 1983\*.

**Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* MOROCCO Vagrant: Ain El Ouata near Fès on 17th February 1985.

**Dowitcher** *Limnodromus* PORTUGAL Vagrant: Quinta da Rocha, Alvor Estuary, Algarve, on 15th October 1985.

**Slender-billed Curlew** *Numenius tenuirostris* MOROCCO Decline: commonly reported until 1960s, 12 records in 1970s, and only four since 1980: 3rd January 1982 at Merja Zerga lagoon, seven at mouth of Oued Smir on 28th January 1983, mouth of Oued Tahadart on 22nd August 1983, and four at Merja Zerga lagoon on 26th January 1986.

**Upland Sandpiper** *Bartramia longicauda* FRANCE Third record: Ouessant during 5th-7th September 1985\*.

**Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis* MOROCCO Fifth winter record: Sidi-Moussa and Qualidia marshes on 1st January 1985 (many sightings in March-May and September-November). NORWAY First and second records: Sör Tröndelag on 18th May 1983, and Vestfold on 5th June 1983 (cf. best-ever totals in Sweden and Finland in 1983, *Brit. Birds* 77: 236, 78: 342).

**Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* SWEDEN Third record: Getterön, Varberg, during 8th-17th November 1985\*.

**Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* NORWAY Fourth record: Rogaland during 17th-19th November 1983.



**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*  
BELGIUM First breeding record since 1951:  
brood of three young near Couvin, Namur,  
on 30th June 1985.

**Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius*  
MOROCCO Unusual winter numbers: 20 off  
Rabat on 6th January 1985 and 30 there on  
30th January 1985.

**Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus*  
DENMARK Large influx in autumn 1985: high-  
est numbers were 89 passing Skagen on 12th  
November, and 72 at Køg harbour on 9th  
November. FINLAND Unusually numerous:  
about 20 records\*, mostly juveniles, in  
autumn 1985. NETHERLANDS Large influx:  
many hundreds everywhere along coast and  
at many places inland in November 1985  
(usually only a few hundreds in August-  
November); largest numbers on 7th and 11th  
November. SWEDEN Highest-ever numbers:  
in first half of November 1985 (e.g. 51 at  
Gubbanäsan, Varberg, on 6th and 94 at  
Hönö, Göteborg, on 10th).

**Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus*  
GREECE Third record: second-year in Evros  
Delta on 14th June 1985.

**Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus*  
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY Range ex-  
pansion: first breeding in Bavaria, at  
Ammersee, attempt in 1981 and successful in  
1982. FRANCE Breeding: pair bred in Alsace  
in 1985. POLAND Third and fourth breeding  
records: single nests on River Vistula near  
Dęblin in 1984 and in Siedlce in 1985. (Cf.  
breeding establishment or increases in Bel-  
gium, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Spain and  
Sweden, *Brit. Birds* 72: 278, 73: 258-259, 74:  
261, 75: 270, 571, 76: 274, 568, 77: 237, 78:  
342, 641).

**Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* DENMARK First  
and second records: second-year in Vejlerne  
from late June to early September 1985, and  
adult at Skagen on 4th-5th July 1985. GREECE  
First record: adult in Alexandroupolis  
harbour on 15th August 1984.

**Franklin's Gull** *Larus pipixcan* FRANCE  
Fourth record: Ouessant on 23rd December  
1985\* (first to third records were in 1977,  
1981 and 1982, *Brit. Birds* 72: 591, 75: 571).

**Audouin's Gull** *Larus audouinii* FRANCE First  
record on Atlantic coast: immature at Pointe  
de L'Aiguillon, Vendée, on 3rd October  
1985\*. MOROCCO Large number wintering far  
south: 707 around Tarfaya (550 km south of  
Agadir) on 20th November 1985 and 689  
there on 27th December 1985 (cf. January

1984 census, when 96% were on Mediter-  
ranean coast, *Brit. Birds* 78: 641).

**Ring-billed Gull** *Larus delawarensis* FRANCE  
At least eight on Atlantic coast in summer  
and autumn 1985\*. NORWAY Second record:  
Bergen from mid October 1983 to mid Feb-  
ruary 1984 (first was on Spitsbergen). (Cf.  
recent records in Britain & Ireland, Federal  
Republic of Germany, Morocco, Poland,  
Spain and Sweden, *Brit. Birds* 78: 641-642.)

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus*  
FINLAND Severe decrease: only about 500  
pairs of *L. f. fuscus* (mainly in Gulf of  
Finland), compared with 1,800 pairs in late  
1950s.

**Glaucous Gull** *Larus hyperboreus* HUNGARY  
Vagrant: adult near Almásfüzitő during 9th-  
24th November 1985; fewer than five pre-  
vious records. SWEDEN Highest-ever num-  
bers: 71 in 1983 and 71 in 1984 (five times as  
many in January-May as in October-Decem-  
ber).

**Ross's Gull** *Rhodostethia rosea* SWEDEN Fourth  
record: juvenile at Göteborg on 10th October  
1984\* (individual at Bohuslän on 31st  
January 1983, previously noted as fourth,  
*Brit. Birds* 77: 237, has not yet been reported  
to Swedish rarities committee).

**Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* LATVIAN SSR Second  
record: Pape in autumn 1985 (first was in  
1983, *Brit. Birds* 77: 237).

**Ivory Gull** *Pagophila eburnea* FINLAND First  
record since 1953: juvenile in Pietarsaari in  
November 1979 (about 22 previous records,  
mostly from Lapland). SWEDEN Fourteenth  
record: first-winter at Landsort, Stockholm,  
during 10th-17th January 1986.

**Lesser Crested Tern** *Sterna bengalensis* ITALY  
First breeding record: pair in colony of  
Sandwich Terns *S. sandwicensis* at Comacchio,  
Emilia Romagna, in June 1985.

**Little Auk** *Alle alle* DENMARK High numbers  
in winters 1984/85 and 1985/86: maximum  
count 80 at Rørvig on 3rd November 1985.  
NORWAY Influx: over 300 in Inner Oslofjord  
on 1st November 1985. SWEDEN High num-  
bers: 65 in 1983, 735 in 1984, and even more  
in 1985 (e.g. 350 at Gubbanäsan, Varberg,  
on 6th November); these are highest num-  
bers observed, but about 6,500 were found  
dead after oil-spill in early January 1981.

**Woodpigeon** *Columba palumbus* DENMARK  
Highest-ever count: at Utterslev Mose on  
outskirts of Copenhagen, total of 111,170  
passed, mostly during 07.05-09.40 hours.

**Rufous Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia orientalis* SWEDEN Wintering again: Mörbylånga, Öland, in winter/spring 1984/85 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 642) reappeared on 17th November 1985 and stayed into 1986.

**Ring-necked Parakeet** *Psittacula krameri* YUGOSLAVIA Breeding: small colony with successful breeding near Trieste on Italian/Yugoslav border since 1975.

**Barn Owl** *Tyto alba* SWEDEN Breeding remnants: pair reared broods of two and three young in 1984; none breeding in 1985, but a few individuals seen (30 pairs were breeding in Skåne 20 years ago: *Brit. Birds* 77: 238).

**Great Grey Owl** *Strix nebulosa* FINLAND Southerly extension of breeding range: two pairs reared six young near Helsinki in summer 1985. SWEDEN High breeding numbers: at least 70 pairs in 1984 (same number as in record year, 1981), and present at 60 further localities, where breeding possible; bred in several other areas south of normal range.

**Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus* FAEROE ISLANDS Eleventh record: juvenile dead in Tórshavn on 7th March 1985.

**Alpine Swift** *Apus melba* NORWAY Sixth record: Vestfold on 18th June 1983. SWEDEN Fifth record: Varberg on 6th June 1984 (two in September 1981, *Brit. Birds* 75: 571, regarded as relating to one individual, the second Swedish record; and record in April 1984, *Brit. Birds* 78: 343, not yet reported to Swedish rarities committee).

**Little Swift** *Apus affinis* MOROCCO Late breeding: adult feeding nestlings in Meknès on 7th October 1985.

**Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* DENMARK Breeding: three pairs bred in south Jutland in 1985. FRANCE Breeding: four pairs in Jura and at least two pairs in Saône-et-Loire in 1984 (where breeding since 1977). ROMANIA Continuous decline: due to human disturbance and loss of breeding habitats. SWEDEN Highest-ever total: 12 records involving 35 individuals in 1984, including 15 at Hudiksvall, Hälsingland, on 26th May.

**Hoopoe** *Upupa epops* SWEDEN Highest-ever total: about 130 in 1984.

**Black Woodpecker** *Dryocopus martius* DENMARK Small influx in autumn 1985: a few coming in from Scania and a few seen away from usual breeding areas.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major* DENMARK Widespread influx: during July-September 1985.

**Middle Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos medius* LATVIAN SSR First breeding record: 1985 (total of 18 non-breeding records up to 1985).

**Dupont's Lark** *Chersophilus duponti* MOROCCO Records west of normal range: two near Taliouine on 17th April 1985.

**Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha calandra* FINLAND Third record: Juupajoki on 26th May 1985 (second was in March 1985, *Brit. Birds* 78: 643).

**Shore Lark** *Eremophila alpestris* FRANCE High-altitude winter record: at 1,100 m in Haute-Pyrénées on 14th November 1976.

**Brown-throated Sand Martin** *Riparia paludicola* MOROCCO Breeding range extension: several pairs on lower Oued Bou-Regreg, near Rabat, in spring 1985.

**Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica* NETHERLANDS Sixth and seventh records: Katwijk, Zuid-Holland, on 20th October 1985, and Maarn, Utrecht, on 23rd October 1985.

**Pechora Pipit** *Anthus gustavi* POLAND Second record: Przegalina near Gdańsk on 14th April 1985 (first was in September 1983, *Brit. Birds* 77: 239).

**Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* DENMARK Second record: female at Busene on Møn on 6th May 1984. GREECE First record: adult in Keramoti, Nestos, on 29th April 1978. LATVIAN SSR Third record: spring 1985. POLAND Influx: one to four at Jastarnia during 21st April to 26th May 1985 and male at Mosty on 15th May 1985 (only four previous records).

**Waxwing** *Bombycilla garrulus* HUNGARY No records in 1985.

**Alpine Accentor** *Prunella collaris* MOROCCO Second breeding season record in Middle Atlas: three adults (one singing male) on top of Jbel Bou Naceur (3,000 m) on 7th June 1985 (previously known only from High Atlas and Jbel Bou Iblane in Middle Atlas, *Brit. Birds* 78: 643).

**Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos* FINLAND Tenth record (first in autumn): Säppi bird-station on 4th October 1985.

**Siberian Rubythroat** *Luscinia calliope* DENMARK First record: Christiansø in late October 1985.

**Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica* ITALY Second and third confirmed breeding records: two pairs of *L. s. svecica* in Lombard Alps in 1984, and one pair there in 1985 (cf. *Brit. Birds* 78: 344).



**Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus* NETHERLANDS Second record: Texel, Noord-Holland, on 29th September 1985 (first, also on Texel, in 1967). SWEDEN Seventh record: ringed at Torhamn, Blekinge, on 22nd September 1985.

**Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata* NORWAY First record of *S. t. variegata*: example showing characters of this south Russian race caught and ringed in Vestfold during 15th-19th June 1983.

**White's Thrush** *Zoothera dauma* FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY Vagrant: Heligoland, Schleswig-Holstein, on 1st November 1984. ROMANIA Vagrant: Danube Delta on 27th September 1981. SWEDEN Sixth record (and first since 1966): Stenåsa, Öland, on 23rd October 1985\*.

**Redwing** *Turdus iliacus* DENMARK High number: 72,000 with other migrating thrushes at Stensnaes on 11th October 1985.

**American Robin** *Turdus migratorius* NORWAY First record: Hordaland on 3rd October 1983.

**Lanceolated Warbler** *Locustella lanceolata* FINLAND Fourth record: singing male at Rantasalmi on 26th June 1983 (June 1984 record, *Brit. Birds* 77: 590, now becomes fifth record).

**Savi's Warbler** *Locustella luscinioides* FINLAND Third and fourth records: singing males in Janakkala during 19th-26th June 1985 and in Ruotsinpyhhtää during 28th May to 2nd June 1985 (first and second were in 1984, *Brit. Birds* 77: 590). SWEDEN Highest-ever totals: 132 in 1983 and 107 in 1984. (Cf. colonisation of Estonian SSR and Latvian SSR, *Brit. Birds* 71: 256, 72: 592, 76: 275.)

**Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola* NETHERLANDS Deletion: 1967 record now rejected; 1984 record (*Brit. Birds* 78: 344) still under consideration.

**Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum* SWEDEN Highest-ever total: 24 in 1984. First proved breeding: north of Gävle, Gästrikland, in 1984 (cf. first French record in 1984, *Brit. Birds* 78: 344).

**Booted Warbler** *Hippolais caligata* FRANCE Third record: Ouessant on 11th October 1985\* (first and second records were both in 1984, *Brit. Birds* 78: 344). NORWAY Second record: Rogaland on 11th September 1983 (first was in October 1978, *Brit. Birds* 73: 260).

**Tristram's Warbler** *Sylvia deserticola* MOROCCO First proved breeding in Middle Atlas: nest with five young in foothills of Jbel Bou Naceur (2,200 m) on 8th June 1985.

Extension of breeding range: pair displaying and building at Tanalt in Anti-Atlas on 26th June 1984 and family party there on 25th May 1985.

**Rüppell's Warbler** *Sylvia rueppelli* MALTA Vagrant: April 1985 (most recently in 1976, 1978 and 1982).

**Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria* DENMARK 'Small signs of increase, after almost century-long decline.'

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla* FAEROE ISLANDS First case of probable breeding: summer 1985.

**Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides* SWEDEN High numbers: 85 in 1984 (exceeded only in 1978, when about 110).

**Pallas's Warbler** *Phylloscopus proregulus* ESTONIAN SSR Ninth record: trapped at Kabli on 9th October 1985 (sixth to eighth records were in 1982, *Brit. Birds* 75: 572).

**Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus* ESTONIAN SSR Sixteenth to twentieth records: three at Kabli, one at Sôrve and one at Lao in 1985. FINLAND Probably largest-ever influx: about 35 in autumn 1985 (previous peak was 28 in 1984). LATVIAN SSR Influx: 12 in Pape in 1985 (same number as in 1984). MALTA Thirteenth to fifteenth records: three ringed in October 1985. NETHERLANDS Largest-ever influx: at least 80 and probably over 100 in late September and October 1985 (only ten to 20 per year during 1980-84; previous highest total, over 30 in 1967). SWEDEN Highest-ever numbers: at least 58 in 1985.

**Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* NETHERLANDS Second record: trapped at Vlieland, Friesland, on 22nd October 1985 (first was in October 1978, *Brit. Birds* 72: 280).

**Semi-collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula semitorquata* MALTA Seventh record: ringed in April 1985 (previous records in 1976, five, and 1982, *Brit. Birds* 76: 569).

**Bearded Tit** *Panurus biarmicus* DENMARK Population recovery: 'after total collapse of breeding population six to seven years ago, and almost complete absence since, seen relatively often in 1985.'

**Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus* ESTONIAN SSR First to third records of individuals with black head-stripes: two trapped at Sôrve on 2nd October 1985\*, singles at Lao on 6th October 1985 and Sôrve on 11th October 1985; latter two identified as *A. c. europaeus*. FINLAND Very large influx: throughout country, and several thousand mist-netted at

bird-stations, during October-November 1985. (Cf. large invasion noted in Finland and Poland in 1977, *Brit. Birds* 71: 257, but no big numbers reported since.)

**Willow Tit** *Parus montanus* DENMARK Colonising: recently established as sparse breeder in South Jutland, with singing males in several localities (cf. first record and first breeding in 1977, *Brit. Birds* 71: 586).

**Siberian Tit** *Parus cinctus* FINLAND Large influx: 70 records, south to southern Finland, in autumn 1985.

**Crested Tit** *Parus cristatus* FINLAND Long-term decrease: winter bird census data show 50% decrease in past 30 years.

**Coal Tit** *Parus ater* DENMARK Massive movements of three common tits: 2,700 Coal Tits at Hammeren and 2,000 Coal Tits at Blavand in September 1985; former locality also had 1,000 Blue *P. caeruleus* and Great Tits *P. major* in one day.

**Blue Tit** *Parus caeruleus* DENMARK Massive movements: 2,500 at Stigsnaes during 22nd September to 6th October 1985; see also under Coal Tit. FINLAND Long-term increase: winter bird census data show continuous population growth in past 30 years, and especially steep increase since mid 1970s.

**Azure Tit** *Parus cyanus* SWEDEN Second record: Blekinge on 12th November 1985 (first record 200 years ago).

**Great Tit** *Parus major* DENMARK See under Coal Tit.

**Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea* MOROCCO Breeding range extension: scarce and local breeder in central High Atlas from Tounfite near Midelt to Ait-Tamlil near Télouet, south to Jbel Anrhommer (31°20'N 7°00'W).

**Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus* SWEDEN Breeding numbers and range increasing: breeding or attempted breeding in Skåne, Öland, Gotland, Östergötland and, for first time, Västergötland; at least 60 young reared in Skåne (cf. increase noted in Finland, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Spain and Yugoslavia, *Brit. Birds* 72: 592, 74: 262, 75: 271, 573, 76: 570, 77: 590, 78: 344, 644).

**Masked Shrike** *Lanius nubicus* MALTA First record: October 1985 (cf. first Finnish record in October 1982, Swedish record in October 1984, *Brit. Birds* 76: 276, 78: 345).

**Magpie** *Pica pica* MOROCCO First record in Rif mountains: four near Al Hoceima on 1st June 1985.

**Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* DENMARK

Invasion: one of largest invasions this century, with 1,500 migrants during 9th September to 7th October 1985, with peak of 252 on 14th September. FINLAND Very large invasion: several thousand records of eastern race *macrorhynchos* in autumn 1985. SWEDEN Irruption: both races involved in autumn 1985. (Apart from a small invasion noted in the Latvian SSR, these were first evidence of any irruption since autumn 1977, *Brit. Birds* 70: 495, 71: 257, 586, 74: 263.)

**Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula* DENMARK High number: 37,240 at Laesø on 15th October 1985, heading for east coast of Jutland.

**Raven** *Corvus corax* FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY First breeding in Hesse since 1912: two pairs at Hersfeld-Rotenburg in 1985.

**Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* FINLAND Recovery from decrease: after severe crash in 1970s, breeding population has recovered locally in south, but still scarce in north.

**Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* MOROCCO First probable breeding in North Africa: three males and three females with brood-patches netted in colony of Spanish Sparrows *P. hispaniolensis* near Kenitra during 10th April to 10th May 1985.

**Red-eyed Vireo** *Vireo olivaceus* FRANCE Second record: Ouessant on 17th October 1985\* (first was in October 1983, *Brit. Birds* 77: 242). NETHERLANDS First and second records: Wormerveer, Noord-Holland, on 13th October 1985, and Rottumerplaat, Groningen, on 19th October 1985.

**Siskin** *Carduelis spinus* FAEROE ISLANDS Invasion: from 1st May 1985 onwards.

**Redpoll** *Carduelis flammea* HUNGARY Influx: after absence of several years, small groups 'everywhere' in winter 1985/86. MALTA Fifth record: December 1985.

**Arctic Redpoll** *Carduelis hornemanni* SWEDEN Second-highest numbers: about 235 in 1984 (125 in October) (cf. large influx in Finland during February-April 1985, *Brit. Birds* 78: 644).

**Two-barred Crossbill** *Loxia leucoptera* FINLAND Large invasion: hundreds of records at coastal bird-stations in late summer and autumn 1985. SWEDEN Irruption: autumn 1985, beginning in July.

**Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra* FAEROE ISLANDS Invasion: about 125 during 25th June to 10th July 1985.

**Scarlet Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY Range



expansion: first breeding attempt in Lower Saxony, at Gronauer Masch in June 1985.

**Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* PORTUGAL Wintering unusually far south: Odelouca, Algarve, in December 1985/January 1986.

**Pine Bunting** *Emberiza leucocephalos* HUNGARY First record: male at Ballahida near Zalaegerszeg on 1st January 1986.

**Rock Bunting** *Emberiza cia* POLAND Third record: male at Przegaleria near Gdańsk on 14th April 1985 (second was in September 1982, *Brit. Birds* 76: 570).

**House Bunting** *Emberiza striolata* MOROCCO Further northerly range extension: first breeding season records in Fès: male singing during 17th April to 11th June 1985 and pair

displaying on 20th June 1985 (cf. extension to Rabat, *Brit. Birds* 78: 645).

**Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* ESTONIAN SSR Third record: trapped at Sôrve on 10th September 1985 (first and second were in 1979 and 1984, *Brit. Birds* 72: 593, 78: 345).

**Yellow-breasted Bunting** *Emberiza aureola* DENMARK First record: Christiansø on 22nd August 1984.

**Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* POLAND Third record: male at Kielce on 29th April 1984.

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak** *Pheucticus ludovicianus* FRANCE First record: immature male on Ouessant during 15th-22nd October 1985\*.

## Correspondents

BELGIUM René de Liedekerke & Drs Franklin L. L. Tombeur, rue des Haies 20, B-5296 Pailhe

CZECHOSLOVAKIA Dr Karel Štastný, Institute of Applied Ecology and Ecotechnology, Agriculture University in Prague, 281 63 Kostelec n.Č.lesy

DENMARK Lars Nørgaard Andersen & Henrik Dissing, Baekkeskovvej 53, DK-2700 Brønshøj

ESTONIAN SSR Dr Vilju Lilleleht, Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR, Institute of Zoology and Botany, 21 Vanemuise St, SU-202400 Tartu

FAEROE ISLANDS Mrs Dorete Bloch, Museum of Natural History, Debesartrød, Tórshavn

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY Alistair Hill, Dachverband Deutscher Avifaunisten, Bundesdeutscher Seltenheiten Ausschuss, Albrecht-Haushofer-Str. 10, 3200 Hildesheim

FINLAND Martti Hario, The Finnish Ornithological Society, P. Rautatiekatu 13, SF-00100 Helsinki 10

FRANCE Dr Philippe J. Dubois, Le Cabestan, 73 avenue Robespierre, 17000 La Rochelle

GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBOURG David Crowther, 18 rue des Eglantiers, L-8227 Mamer

GREECE George I. Handrinos, 50 El Venizelou Street, 166 75 Glyfada

HUNGARY László Haraszthy, Hungarian Ornithological Society, 1121 Budapest, Költö u. 21

ITALY Marco Gustin, Stazione Romana per L'Osservazione e la Protezione degli Uccelli, c/o Oasi Naturale WWF Bosco di Palo, Via Palo Laziale 2, 00055 Ladispoli (Rome)

LATVIAN SSR Dr Jānis Baumanis, Laboratory of Ornithology, Miera 3, Salaspils

MALTA Joe Sultana & Charles Gauci, The Ornithological Society, PO Box 448, Valletta

MOROCCO Michel Thévenot, Université Mohammed V, Institut Scientifique, Charia Ibn Batouta, B.P. 703—Rabat

NETHERLANDS Kees Scharringa, Trompenburg 15, 1852 CB Heiloo

NORWAY Geoffrey Acklam, Nordliveien 18, 1320 Stabekk

POLAND Dr Tadeusz Stawarczyk, Wrocław University, Museum of Natural History, Sienkiewicza 21, 50/335 Wrocław

PORTUGAL Dr António Teixeira, CEMPA, Serviço Nacional de Parques, Reservas e Conservação da Natureza, Rua da Lapa 73, 1200 Lisboa

ROMANIA Dr Victor Ciochia, str. Pavilioanele CFR, No. 30, RO-2200 Braşov

SWEDEN Per Alström, Marholmsvägen 105, S-436 00 Askim

YUGOSLAVIA Iztok Geister, 64202 Naklo, Pokopaliska pot 13

No information was received from Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, German Democratic Republic, Iceland, Spain or Switzerland.

# Notes

**Great Crested Grebe attacking Little Grebe** At 13.40 GMT on 5th April 1983, at Catcliffe Flash, South Yorkshire, I saw an attack by a Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* on a Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*. The Great Crested Grebe grasped the neck of the Little Grebe in its bill and appeared to be trying to submerge it under the water. After several seconds, during which it gave frequent yelping calls, the Little Grebe managed to free itself, but it appeared to have sustained an injury to its left wing which slowed its attempts to escape, and the larger grebe, after chasing it for about 3 m, seized it by the neck again. The Little Grebe got free several times, sometimes diving in its attempts to escape, but it was chased and recaught in the same manner on each occasion. These attacks continued for about two minutes until the victim managed to reach a clump of half-submerged willow *Salix*, where it was able to evade subsequent attempted attacks. The Great Crested followed the Little Grebe for up to 2 m among the dead willow stems, but finally appeared to lose contact and returned to the open water. The Little Grebe was not seen subsequently.

R. DAVID R. WILLIAMS

5 Thorpe House Avenue, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S8 9NG

Dr K. E. L. Simmons has commented as follows: 'I have seen similar behaviour during the early years of my Great Crested Grebe study, but it seems rarely to have been recorded. The Great Crested Grebe Enquiry (*Brit. Birds* 26: 181) said "certainly there is no direct hostility or aggression" between the two species.' Eds

**White-tailed Plover in Tyne & Wear** On 21st May 1984, an adult White-tailed Plover *Chettusia leucura* was watched for a little over an hour on newly sown farmland at Cleadon, Tyne & Wear.

At 16.50 GMT, I was cycling around my local patch when I noticed what was clearly a crouching plover in a distant field. My first thought was that the bird could be a Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*, as that species had favoured neighbouring fields in 1982. A closer approach, however, produced a bird which was totally unfamiliar to me. My first impression was of a large, rather plain plover, with an almost white head and extremely long, lemon-yellow legs. A phone-call to Ian Mills produced the accurate identification and he arrived within a quarter of an hour, closely followed by David Constantine and Peter Hogg.

In good light, at a range of about 80m, the following details were obtained.

**SIZE** Comparable with Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*.

**HEAD** Pale fawn, lightly flecked with sandy streaks. Streaking absent above eye, producing indistinct white supercilium.

**UNDERPARTS** Neck and upper breast duller brown than upperparts, deepening to rich chestnut on lower breast. Belly and flanks off-white, becoming pinkish on vent.

**UPPERPARTS** Pale, sandy brown, with mauve tinge.

**WINGS** Black primaries and mainly white secondaries produced thin black-and-white margin to lower edge of greyish brown wing.

**TAIL** Usually hidden by closed wings, though clearly white and unmarked.





**BARE PARTS** Legs long and lemon-yellow. Bill Lapwing. Eye large and dark, contrasting black and proportionately longer than that of with pale head.

In flight, the plover took on a completely different character. The wings were broad and rounded. The strongly contrasting black-and-white wing pattern reminded PH and DC of Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini* and the rich colouring was enhanced by the white tail and uppertail-coverts. The lower legs and feet extended well beyond the tip of the tail.

The bird remained in the field until about 18.10 GMT, when it circled high over our heads before disappearing to the southwest. It had constantly been irritated by the presence of other birds, particularly Lapwings, but also Linnets *Carduelis cannabina*. It frequently crouched very low and became difficult to see. Persistent territorial aggression by a Lapwing caused the plover's premature departure.

The only previous records of White-tailed Plover in Britain and Ireland were in Warwickshire in July 1975 (*Brit. Birds* 70: 465-471) and in Dorset in July 1979 (*Brit. Birds* 74: 228), but one (perhaps the same bird) was discovered in Shropshire three days after this one in Tyne & Wear (see below).

B. S. BATES

10 Wingrove Avenue, Sunderland, SR6 9HJ

**White-tailed Plover in Shropshire** On the evening of 24th May 1984, I received a telephone call from Paul Swales informing me that he had seen a White-tailed Plover *Chettusia leucura*. He needed someone to corroborate the sighting and we arranged to meet the following morning.

At 05.20 GMT, we arrived at the site: a meadow which had been flooded during the winter months, and which still held a large area of shallow water. Vegetation around the pool was mainly lush grass, with patches of rushes and, where the water had most recently receded, bare or very sparsely vegetated ground. Within minutes of arrival, we had noted a pair of Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus*, up to seven Redshanks *Tringa totanus*, a Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, a Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*, a Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, and a Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*.

After about five minutes, the White-tailed Plover appeared, in low flight, closely pursued by a Lapwing. The two species were similar in size, but the former appeared less bulky. The colour pattern in flight was very striking: an area of white stretched across the full wing, from the alula, through the greater primary coverts and along the secondaries. This was sandwiched between the brown wing-coverts and the large solid black wedge of the primaries. The rump and tail were completely white, with the legs protruding well beyond the end of the tail. The mantle was brown, and the bird appeared almost white-headed. The pursuit was broken off and both birds alighted. The White-tailed Plover was seen in flight on three further occasions as it moved around the site to feed, for distances of from 20 to 60m, and it always kept within two metres of the ground.

From the initial sighting until we departed an hour later, the White-tailed Plover was present continuously, although at times it was hidden from view in dead ground. Viewing distances ranged from 80 to 150m, and sightings varied from partially obscured views to watching the bird feeding

# Overseas bird tours survey

If you have participated in a trip organised by a bird tour company, please complete this form and send it before the end of the month to: *Bird tour survey, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.*

Number of bird tours in which you have participated

Please fill in, below, details of the most recent tour in which you have participated during 1976-86 (if you have accompanied more than one, please use additional photocopy(ies) of this form or blank sheet(s) to supply details of all those in which you have participated).

Destination (country or countries)

Dates 

Month
-------

Year 19
---------

 Length of trip 

days
------

Name of tour company

Were the company's travel arrangements  
(tick one)

Excellent	Very good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
-----------	-----------	------	----------	------	-----------

(We are asking you to assess the arrangements made by the company, and *not* the standard available in the country. Some good bird areas have only poor-quality roads, or unreliable drivers, or poor accommodation. It is the performance of the travel company in making appropriate arrangements that we ask you to comment upon.)

Were the company's accommodation  
arrangements (tick one)

Excellent	Very good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
-----------	-----------	------	----------	------	-----------

Do you consider that the company's choice of areas visited included a representative selection of the region's habitats, and gave a satisfactory bird list?

Yes	No
-----	----

Including any couriers and leaders, how many people were in your group?

For enjoyable birdwatching, was  
the size of the group

Too large	Acceptable	Perfect	Too small
-----------	------------	---------	-----------

Did an ornithological tour leader accompany the group?

Yes	No
-----	----

(If more than one ornithological leader accompanied the group, please enter number here )

Would you rate the leader's\* ornithological ability as (tick one)

Excellent	Very good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
-----------	-----------	------	----------	------	-----------

Was the leader's\* ability to cope in a crisis (tick one)

Excellent	Very good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
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Were the leader's\* efforts to be flexible, and to ensure that the whole group enjoyed the trip (tick one)

Excellent	Very good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
-----------	-----------	------	----------	------	-----------

\*We guarantee not to try to identify the individual leaders; we are assessing whether the tour companies choose appropriate leaders, not whether individual leaders were good or bad.



Taking into account possible faults in a leader\*, such as selfishness when a good bird was found; or unwillingness to organise early starts on the one hand or excessive zeal on the other, did you personally find the leader's general attitude

Excellent	Very good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
-----------	-----------	------	----------	------	-----------

Did you find the leader\*  
(tick one)

Too fanatical	About right	Too relaxed (or even lazy)
---------------	-------------	----------------------------

Did a courier (dealing with administrative arrangements) also accompany the tour?

Yes	No
-----	----

(If the ornithological leader acted as courier, please answer 'No' to this question)

Would you rate the courier's services as

Excellent	Very good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
-----------	-----------	------	----------	------	-----------

Was it helpful to have a courier present?

Yes	No
-----	----

As a whole, would you personally rate the trip as

	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Excellent
--	-----------	------	--------------	------	-----------

In 'value for money' terms, was it

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very poor
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Was the written advice and other information supplied before the tour

Excellent	Very good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
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Do you think that the advantages of joining this bird tour group outweighed any disadvantages (compared with visiting the same region independently)?

Yes	No
-----	----

Do you plan to join another bird tour at some time in the future?

Yes	No
-----	----

If 'Yes', and the bird tour company which you named above were to run the appropriate tour, would you choose to book with them again?

Yes	Perhaps	No
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in completely open situations. The best view was a ten-minute period when the plover fed on bare open ground. The light was very good and we were both equipped with binoculars and telescopes. Sketches were made during the hour the bird was under observation, and the following notes are a summary of those made at the time.

**COLOUR** Mantle and closed wings uniform brown, with hint of purple, except for thin black line running for almost full length of wing and terminating in protruding tips of primaries. Small patch of white showing immediately forward of these tips appeared to be made by secondaries being not quite covered by wing-coverts. Breast darker than mantle, becoming darker in lower area where it ended in distinct line. Below this line, underparts pinkish, becoming whiter in vent area. Tail, seen when bird preened, white. Head paler than mantle, except crown, which noticeably darker. Slight dark line extending back from eye. Nape grey. Forehead, 'face' and chin slightly off-white. These head colours very delicate, the bird looking quite white-headed to the naked eye, and even through binoculars, but the pattern described seen clearly through telescope. Legs very bright lemon-yellow and long. Ratio of tibia to tarsus about one to three. Bill black and short, being approximately half to

two-thirds of head length. Eye dark, appearing black.

**FLIGHT** Somewhat similar to that of Lapwing, but narrower wings made flight appear more direct and less floppy.

**MOVEMENT** Impression created by bird's general movements and manner was one of great elegance. It fed by stooping as it walked. Although it varied in pace as it fed, even when it was moving more quickly it still did not run. Quite often an erect stance was taken, with neck extended, and the bird was obviously alert. On a few occasions, it bobbed.

**INTERACTION WITH OTHER SPECIES** Although often passing close to Redshanks and the Dunlin, the White-tailed Plover ignored them and fed alone. Only positive interaction with another species was pursuit by Lapwing (as mentioned earlier). Although both birds remained in area, there was no further aggression.

I made no further visits to the site, but Paul Swales kept a regular watch on the meadow to ascertain the length of the bird's stay. It was seen on 26th, 27th, 28th May, and 3rd June, which proved to be the final sighting.

After considerable thought, we decided against making the sighting public. The Rarity-finders Code as printed in *British Birds* (75: 301-303) was our guide. The main cause for concern was the fact that the site was on private land, and in a position completely unsuitable to handle hordes of visitors. We were further influenced by the disrespect shown to private property some months previously by enthusiasts determined to see a mere Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, which had turned up on a permit-only site. This resulted in a severe deterioration in relationships between the landowners and local birdwatchers. The White-tailed Plover site is not a regular birdwatching location, and the occurrence was a 'one-off'. We feel that to give the 10-km square reference, SJ61, which is northwest of Telford, Shropshire, is of sufficient accuracy to satisfy all reasonable purposes.

This was the fourth record of White-tailed Plover in Britain and Ireland, the previous three being in Warwickshire in July 1975 (*Brit. Birds* 70: 465-471), in Dorset in July 1979 (*Brit. Birds* 74: 228) and in Tyne & Wear just three days before this Shropshire occurrence (see above).

JACK SANKEY

11 Mardol Terrace, Smithfield Road, Much Wenlock, Shropshire TF136BH

**Immature White-cheeked Tern helping to defend chick** On 11th June 1982, during a visit to a colony of White-cheeked Terns *Sterna repressa* just off



the Saudi Arabian mainland coast in the Persian Gulf (27°N 49°E), I noted a small number of first-summer individuals among the breeding adults. The terns seemed to be in all stages of the breeding cycle: there were fresh eggs, eggs hatching, chicks, and even a few flying juveniles attended by aggressive adults. I was about to leave the islet, which meant wading waist-deep across a creek, when a pair of adults became typically anxious as I passed a ten-day-old chick away from the main colony. The chick was able to run strongly, and swam confidently when necessary. During the whole of this short episode, the two adults were accompanied by an immature. When the adults pitched on the sand near the retreating chick, the immature pitched, too. When the adults hovered low over the swimming chick, the immature hovered nearby, all three uttering the short 'kit' alarm note and the long 'kee-yaah' call. The adults were restless and ascended repeatedly during my passing, in order to stoop towards my head; twice the immature followed suit and performed low-intensity dives towards me.

GRAHAM BUNDY

*The Crest, Blythe Shute, Chale, Isle of Wight PO38 2HJ*

Dr E. K. Dunn has commented as follows: 'It is not unusual among terns of various species to flock over a chick breaking cover or running away. In my account of Common Tern *S. hirundo* in *BWP* (4: 80) I have drawn attention to this characteristic response: "Chick leaving cover may attract adult flock hovering overhead from which individuals periodically swoop as if attacking or driving it back to cover." A swimming chick is an especially strong stimulus for eliciting this sort of response. The birds typically divide their attention between chivvying the chick and attacking the human intruder. Though I have not noticed it before, it would not greatly surprise me if, from time to time, an immature got caught up in the general excitement and behaved like the adults usually do, the more so because clearly only two of the mobbing birds can be the parents of the chick in question. The others are either terns attracted from a distance or those whose breeding territories are infringed by the fleeing chick and trespassing human.' Eds

**Scops Owl sunbathing** On 6th August 1983, along the lower section of the Barranco de Algender, Menorca, my attention was drawn by the alarm calls of several birds, indicating the presence of a predator. Scanning the vegetation through binoculars revealed a perched Scops Owl *Otus scops* about 75m away. Through a 45× telescope, I was able to observe the owl in some detail. It was perched on a bare, almost horizontal branch of a large *Phillyrea* bush about 2m from any cover or shade. It had its upperparts angled towards the sun and, with wings and tail partially spread and wings drooped, was obviously sunbathing. It would stay motionless for periods of up to ten minutes, apparently not being bothered by the brief visits of a Great Tit *Parus major*, three Sardinian Warblers *Sylvia melanocephala*, a Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* and a Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*, none of which approached closer than 20cm to the owl. Only twice did it turn its head, when the strong morning sun shone directly into its eyes, and I could see how contracted the pupils were in the yellow irises. I watched from 08.30 to 09.00 hours, and then disturbed the owl in order to verify that it was not injured or sick; it flew off strongly. The alarm calls of the various visiting passerines were somewhat subdued and not of the intensity norm-

ally directed at Scops Owls in Menorca. I can find no reference to nocturnal owls sunbathing.

ED MACKRILL

*Apartment 1-2 II, Paseo del Rio 6, Puerto Soto Grande, Cadiz, Spain*

Although Scops Owls do very occasionally hunt during the daytime, Heimo Mikkola (1983, *Owls of Europe*) makes no mention of sunbathing by this species. EDS

### **Opportunistic use by birds of ephemeral food source in hard weather**

On 24th December 1981, in Morayshire, during a prolonged cold spell (maximum daytime temperature  $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), we observed abnormal feeding behaviour by Fieldfares *Turdus pilaris* and Redwings *T. iliacus*. A land drain was being dredged, and the sediment deposited on the banks contained an abundance of food. Fieldfares and Redwings were seen to swallow small eels *Anguilla anguilla* up to an estimated 12 cm. This local abundance of food attracted a great variety of other bird species, including Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Common Gull *Larus canus*, Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus*, Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*, Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*, Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* and Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*. Each Redshank held its own small territory of dredgings and was exceptionally aggressive towards other Redshanks.

JOHN BARRETT and CATRINA BARRETT

*Gunnersvale Farm Cottage, near Elwick, Cleveland TS27 3HH*

**Hermit Thrush in Scilly** At about 10.35 GMT on 28th October 1984, whilst walking towards Peninnis Head, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, I noticed a small bird diving for cover in the bank of gorse *Ulex* to the west of the headland. I relocated the bird running away from me some 40m farther on, and its appearance, though briefly seen, was of a small thrush with prominently rufous tail and perhaps warm uppertail-coverts and lower rump. After ten minutes, I again glimpsed it, and saw a prominent eye-ringing. In due course, I was joined by I. Lewington and S. Davies, who saw the bird in a brief flight, giving them no clues as to its identity, and myself a momentary lack of confidence. After alerting the late David B. Hunt via the CB radio, I again saw the bird and, although a tantalising view beneath a bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, it confirmed my suspicions of a small thrush as the bird was heavily spotted on the upper breast, having a clean, unmarked



Fig. 1. Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus*, Scilly, October 1984 (S. M. Andrews)



throat and strong malar stripe. The probability of its being a Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus* was high, but, as I was a single observer, lacking a field-guide, I kept my mouth shut. After arriving with DBH, Paul Holness—a welcome driving force—joined me in an extensive, but fruitless search over the next few hours. Eventually, thanks to Porthloo Val, who cycled around the island gathering birders, a small group arrived. Despite doing its best to conceal itself, the bird finally gave good views on the ground, on a bush and on a wall, although fog was coming in and the light waning fast.

The following description was taken in the field:

**SIZE** Basically like small, fat Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, or perhaps reminiscent of big Robin *Erithacus rubecula*.

**UPPERPARTS** Forehead, crown, nape, mantle, scapulars and upper rump like that of Song Thrush, though possibly darker olive-brown. Lower rump, uppertail-coverts and tail rufous/reddish-brown, more reminiscent of Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* than Nightingale *L. megarhynchos*, with uppertail-coverts appearing brighter and more rufous in better morning light. Lores and ear-coverts olive-brown. Supercilium virtually unnoticeable; short, slightly paler patch in front of eye. Eye-ring virtually complete and strong white.

**UNDERPARTS** Chin and throat clean white, unmarked; black unbroken malar stripe. Lower breast, belly and vent clean white. Upper breast and anterior flanks white, heavily marked with clean, black spots, stopping almost like markings on Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*. Flanks washed

grey, strongly in places.

**WINGS** Coverts same as mantle, with slightly paler fringes; slight wing-bar seen in flight at close range. Primaries and secondaries darker than coverts; base of primaries on closed wing reddish-brown, forming warm panel; outer primary edges also darker. Tertiaries slightly darker than mantle, with outer edging noticeably darker. Very noticeable dark alula.

**BARE PARTS** Bill typically thrush-like, horn to brown, pale from base of lower mandible to about halfway. Eyes large, black. Legs long, pale pink.

**BEHAVIOUR** Flights always low over ground, and, although bird obviously tired (on one occasion lying rather than sitting on a wall), when alighting, it flicked tail up, holding wings low. Spent most of the time sitting at base of bushes, occasionally flitting out onto grass, but at no time whilst in view did it attempt to feed.

After the last of the small number of observers remaining on the island had arrived and seen the bird, it dived for cover and was never seen again.

This was only the second record of this Nearctic species in Britain and Ireland, the first also being a 'one-day bird', on Fair Isle, Shetland, on 2nd June 1975 (*Brit. Birds* 72: 414-417).

S. M. ANDREWS

Flat 7, 47 Severn Street, Leicester

**Blackbird and Song Thrush using same song post** On 1st June 1982, from my garden in Louth, Lincolnshire, I saw a Blackbird *Turdus merula* and a Song Thrush *T. philomelos* simultaneously using the same chimney stack as a song post. Although they were at times within 0.5 m of each other, neither showed any aggression towards the other. What made this incident of particular interest, however, was that they were singing antiphonally. The Blackbird would utter a few phrases, pause, the Song Thrush would take its turn, and so on; this continued for about 15 minutes, until the Song Thrush flew away, leaving the Blackbird alone on its favoured perch.

J. R. CLARKSON

34 Kenwick Road, Louth, Lincolnshire LN11 8EG



159. Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* and Blackbird *T. merula* (see note on facing page).  
Lincolnshire, June 1982 (J. R. Clarkson)

**Trumpeter Finch in West Sussex** During the morning of 19th May 1984, Mr & Mrs R. W. Russell located an unidentified finch at Church Norton, West Sussex. The strikingly pale and relatively featureless plumage suggested an escaped cage-bird and, although it was seen later in the day by other observers including E. D. Lloyd and A. Silcocks, it was not identified specifically.

The following morning, N. Crooks, Mrs B. & C. M. James and I relocated the bird and considered the possibility of its being a Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*. It was observed feeding with a flock of Linnets *Carduelis cannabina* and, as soon as the trumpeting call was heard, the identification was confirmed. The description given below is compiled from the detailed notes taken in the field. Other observers were contacted and hundreds saw the bird during its stay.

**SIZE AND STRUCTURE** Dumpy finch, with large round head and plump body. Slightly larger than Linnet, but very much stockier and plumper-bodied. Wings short and rounded, appearing broad in flight. Tail short for size of bird and slightly notched.

**UPPERPARTS** Head uniform sandy brown. Lores pinkish-orange, appearing blackish at long range. Thin dark line from base of bill, through eye to ear-coverts. Back and scapulars sandy brown, upper rump greyish, lower rump salmon-pink, similar in tone to that of male Twite *C. flavirostris*. Tail browner

than rest of upperparts. Wing-coverts slightly darker than body plumage; secondaries and primaries sandy buff brown.

**UNDERPARTS** Chin, throat, breast and belly unstreaked sandy brown, shading to orange-buff on undertail-coverts. Flanks rather greyer than rest of underparts.

**BARE PARTS** Bill noticeably large and broad based, almost conical in outline, pinkish-red, but appearing greyish in dull light.

**VOICE** Flight call a distinctive buzzing 'cheez', similar in tone to noise emitted from child's toy trumpet.



The bird fed almost entirely with Linnets, often taking flight with them when disturbed and then disappearing for long periods. It remained in the area until 23rd May 1984, when it was killed by a Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*.

In view of the possibility of the bird being an escape, E. D. Lloyd contacted the Cage Bird Society. They informed him that none was kept in captivity in this country, according to their records. As this individual showed no leg rings or marked plumage abrasion, it is reasonable to assume that it was a true vagrant. This is the fourth record of this desert species in Britain and Ireland, the previous three being in Suffolk and Sutherland in May/June 1971 (*Brit. Birds* 70: 45-49) and in Orkney in May 1981 (*Brit. Birds* 76: 523).

P. JAMES

70 Denmark Villas, Hove, East Sussex

## Seventy-five years ago...

'PROBABLE SNOW-GEESE IN ESSEX. I have received a communication from Major J. Thornhill, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, to the effect that while he was searching the marshes in the neighbourhood of that place on April 13th, 1911, he observed two pairs of birds which he identified, with all the certainty possible under the circumstances, as Snow-Geese (*Chen hyperboreus*, Pall). The birds were very wild, but it could be seen that "they were quite white, except the flight-feathers, which were black." At first he wondered if they could be Gannets, but "was quickly undeceived by their manner of flight." While recognising that records of rare birds, unaccompanied by specimens, must always be received with caution and reserve, I venture to hold that the exceptional clearness and unmistakableness of the identification characters of this species, give this record a much greater value than is usual in such cases. A LANDSBOROUGH THOMSON.' (*Brit. Birds* 5: 25, June 1911)

## Letters

**British rarities in a foreign perspective** In a letter (*Brit. Birds* 78: 51-52), Norman Elkins hypothesised on the possible route of a single Yellow-browed Bunting *Emberiza chrysophrys* which arrived on Fair Isle, Shetland, in October 1980.

Contrary to Alan Kitson and Iain Robertson (*Brit. Birds* 76: 217-225), Elkins did not believe in a reverse great circle route across northern Siberia and Norway. Elkins considered wind-drift as the major force of vagrancy, and in the week before the Fair Isle record the winds were westerly in northern Siberia.

I have some comments on this point of view.

First, one should realise that the movement of Siberian vagrants from their breeding grounds to northern and western Europe may last for a long time: one month, or even two months or more. The Yellow-browed Bunting may well have reached Finland/Scandinavia a week before it got to Fair Isle. Anyway, track-analyses based on single records are endowed with (too) much uncertainty.

Dispersal/random orientation in connection with wind-drift is an appropriate explanation of the patterns of records of most rarities. Especially the Siberian vagrants seem well oriented within northern and western Europe, but in a 'wrong' direction south of west. The cause of this 'wrong' but active

progress could be simple (and thus probably recurrent) errors in the genetically based orientation programme; or errors which arise under the execution of an otherwise correct programme.

Reverse great circle navigation may be such an error, and formerly I was an eager proposer of this hypothesis in the case of the orientation of Pallas's Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus* within western Siberia and Europe (*Dansk Orn. Foren. Tidsskr.* 70: 5-16). Now, however, I do not believe in the *process* of great circle navigation, which seems to be a superfluous complication also in cases where the normal migratory track follows a great circle route. Furthermore, as learned from experiments with homing pigeons *Columba livia*, co-ordinate navigation seems to be a much less precise process than was formerly envisaged. These points reduce *reverse* great circle co-ordinate navigation to an academic possibility of extremely low probability.

There is, however, no urgent need involving the process of reverse great circle navigation as an explanation of the south-of-west tracks of, for example, Pallas's Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler *P. inornatus* and Dusky Warbler *P. fuscatus* within northern and western Europe. The south-of-west tracks of these species become evident when the Baltic and Nordic records are considered. Both the absolute numbers and the 'centres of gravity' are significantly more northerly distributed in the Baltic region than within Britain and Ireland, a fact known for a long time (at least since my 1976 paper cited above).

A tentative explanation of the south-of-west track could be an initial phase of reverse (northwesterly) orientation from the breeding grounds and then later on a change to 'complementary' orientation (i.e. the northerly component of the reverse orientation changes into the southerly component of the normal migratory track, whereas the erroneous westerly component remains unchanged).

Finally, I do recommend that British ornithologists interested in rarities should read the Nordic journals of ornithology. The language may be strange, but the scientific names of the birds are the same all over the world, and Arabic numerals are also used in the Nordic countries. JØRGEN RABØL  
*Institute of Population-biology, Universitetsparken 15, 2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark*

Norman Elkins has commented as follows. 'My letter was prompted by the fact that a great circle route was incompatible with the synoptic situation over such a route if one assumed that the bird had departed from its breeding grounds within the previous week or two. I did point out the difficulties of assessing a vagrant's route when the duration of passage is unknown.

'It is certainly quite possible for these individuals to have taken weeks (or months?), but one would expect that, over such a time scale, there would have to be an inordinate length of time spent off passage. If a bird has a strong migratory urge, and is well-oriented as Dr Rabøl suggests (even if it is in the wrong direction), I should be surprised if delays added up to such a lengthy period, particularly as some birds on a great circle route would pass over quite inhospitable terrain in autumn. A more leisurely passage over more suitable terrain would be more likely for drift migrants originally on post-juvenile dispersal. The recent paper on Pallas's Warblers in October 1982 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 381-392) does offer further evidence of vagrant drift movements, and I still favour this concept. I would also suggest that the majority of oriented long-distance migrants normally use an approximate great circle, and therefore reverse migration is also along a great circle.

'I take Dr Rabøl's point about the northerly distribution of far-eastern vagrants, but this must partly reflect the distribution of observers and observatories in northern and central



Europe. A further valid reason could be that, as the track of depressions in autumn is rarely south of latitude 55°N, any drift migrants reaching Britain must necessarily have travelled in the windflows on the northern flank of such disturbances, and thus well north, over Scandinavia. On this premise, those moving into central Europe would make little or no progress westwards. His comment about the use of Continental journals is probably true; we British have an aversion to the lesser-known languages, quite apart from the relative inaccessibility of such journals.

‘To summarise: we still do not know just what these birds are doing, nor how long they have been doing it; but it’s fine to speculate!’ Eds

**East is east, and west is west, and oft the twain shall meet (with apologies to Kipling)** In view of the interest in vagrant passerines and near-passerines from both the Nearctic and eastern Palearctic regions in recent years, it would seem timely to ponder on the mechanism of their respective arrivals in autumn. A close comparison of the numbers of these birds recorded in Britain and Ireland reveals a striking coincidence in the peak years of vagrancy, and an approximate seven-year cycle becomes apparent, with relatively high numbers of both groups in 1968, 1975-76 and 1981-82 (see fig. 1).

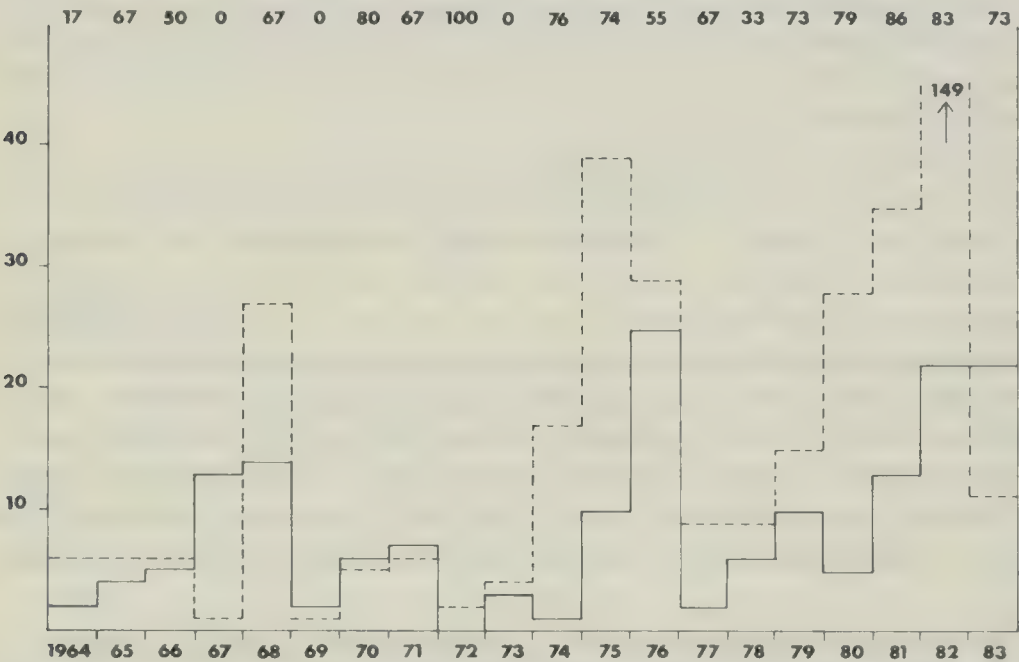


Fig. 1. Numbers of Nearctic (continuous line) and eastern Palearctic (dotted line) vagrants recorded in autumn in Britain and Ireland during 1964-83. Nearctic species include all landbirds, while Palearctic species include the rarer, more southerly breeding, species whose nearest breeding range is 55°E (i.e. warblers, Sylviidae; thrushes and chats, Turdinae; and buntings, Emberizidae: 13 species in total). Figure at top of each column shows percentage of Pallas's Warblers *Phylloscopus proregulus* in each autumn fall of Palearctic vagrants

Three possible explanations can be suggested for these fluctuations:

1. The often-quoted growth in the number of observers and the improvement in their identification skills with the passage of time
2. Population changes and/or range expansion
3. Meteorological factors.

The first is a valid one, but which, as an approximately linear expansion, merely ensures that the number and variety of vagrants increase in each

peak autumn.

The second is doubtless of greater importance, with a high percentage of first-year birds comprising the majority of vagrants. Sharrock (1976) has already drawn attention to vagrancy patterns, suggesting that they may reflect high populations. Certainly, the high numbers of eastern Palearctic *Phylloscopus* warblers in 1981 and 1982 were paralleled in northern Europe. That such factors should operate on both Nearctic and Palearctic species in the same seasons would, however, be surprising.

The last explanation also appears to be plausible with regard to the observed coincidence of vagrancy from the west and the east. I have already (Elkins 1979) described the abnormalities of the atmospheric circulation which contribute towards Nearctic landbird vagrancy in northwestern Europe. Abnormalities in circulation do tend to occur in several parts of the hemisphere during the same season. The circulation in the middle atmosphere, which controls the movement and development of weather systems at lower levels (described in Elkins 1983), shows a waving pattern, with several cold troughs and warm ridges around the hemisphere.

The low-level pattern conducive to eastward transatlantic vagrancy shows a southward displacement of the polar front, together with fast eastward-moving warm sectors (Elkins 1979). Associated mid-atmospheric cold troughs are likely to be found near the eastern seaboard of North America and in the vicinity of Britain and Ireland. This latter trough is likely to induce a warm ridge over Scandinavia, with a surface high-pressure system beneath it, linked to the building autumn Siberian anticyclone. The trough over Britain and Ireland contributes towards lower surface pressure than normal over the region surrounding southern Britain and, together with the Scandinavian anticyclone, creates a surface flow over the North Sea and southern Baltic Sea with an easterly component. Thus, the arrival of vagrants from the west may, through the atmospheric circulation pattern, coincide approximately with those from the east.

There is little doubt that, in the periods during which the two groups coincide, the atmosphere is colder than normal between the British Isles and Newfoundland (associated with the more southern position of the polar front), but warmer than normal over the region between east Greenland and eastern Europe (associated with the warm ridge).

The above described pattern occurred in 1968, 1976 and 1982, with the mean circulation in the Octobers of the last two years almost identical. In October 1982, the peak arrival of eastern Palearctic vagrants was sandwiched between an arrival of Nearctic waders and the bulk of the Nearctic landbirds. As already suggested (Elkins 1983), waders are thought to be more directly influenced by upper windflows than surface features and, indeed, the transatlantic westerly jet stream in October 1982 was stronger and farther south than normal (Ratcliffe 1983).

This circulation pattern was not so evident in 1975 and 1981, when falls did not coincide. Nearctic species differed from those in 1976 and 1982, and arrived mainly in late September, some two to three weeks before the eastern vagrants (see Elkins 1979 for discussion on species-composition and timing).



It is emphasised that the initial westward movement of central Asian birds is thought to be unrelated to the large-scale mid-atmospheric circulation *per se*, since the Siberian anticyclone and its easterly airflows are shallow features overlain by an upper westerly flow. It is the circulation in Europe and Russia that gives the already westward-moving birds the impetus to penetrate into Scandinavia and the North Sea region, as has already been shown (Baker 1977; Howey and Bell 1985; Wheeler 1985).

Another point of interest is the high proportion of central Asian thrushes (Turdinae) which appear in winter. Although these populations normally winter in southern Asia, their arrival pattern in western Europe parallels that of their North American congener, the American Robin *Turdus migratorius*, whose transatlantic movements are thought to be linked to hard-weather passage in the USA (Elkins 1979, 1983). NORMAN ELKINS

*18 Scotstarvit View, Cupar, Fife KY15 4DX*

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**Vagrants and Saharan dust** In my book, *Weather and Bird Behaviour* (Elkins 1983), I drew attention to the unseasonal arrival of migrants in association with falls of Saharan dust in Britain, in particular an early fall of summer migrants in March 1977. Such dust falls depend on rather precise meteorological conditions, but show little seasonality other than a slight preponderance towards the winter months. They have been well described and documented by Wheeler (1985, 1986) in connection with a noticeable dust fall in November 1984.

The fine dust originates in the Sahara desert, being whipped up by strong surface winds and then lifted, to be carried in suspension by southerly winds at probable altitudes of 3 to 5 km. The dust is normally precipitated out with rain. Transport to Britain is an exceptional occurrence, subject to the persistence (in both time and space) of the dust-bearing upper winds, which form part of deep, warm, southerly airflows between anticyclones over Europe and low pressure in the eastern Atlantic. The effect on migrants of the lower-level windflows in these airmasses depends on the season in which they occur, and two events other than that of 1977 can be identified. Mid May 1979 produced a selection of overshooting southern rarities in Britain (mainly vagrant herons (Ardeidae) and Alpine Swifts *Apus melba*) in a brief warm spell during which a dust fall was recorded on 15th in Northern Ireland. Overshooting in warm spells is, however, not an uncommon event in late spring.

The most recent event, in November 1984, was of particular interest. Dust, probably originating in northern Saharan dust storms on 7th, fell on 9th and 10th, coincident with the arrival in southern England of several Pallid Swifts *Apus pallidus* and, a few days later, a Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* (*Brit. Birds* 78: 120, 563, 572) in unusually warm weather. Several Subalpine Warblers *Sylvia cantillans* also occurred in November, although two were earlier in the month. Such late records of southern vagrants suggest a remarkable 'reverse' migration, except that the western population of the Desert Wheatear is at most only a partial migrant from its breeding grounds in subsaharan North Africa. Two other individuals of this extreme rarity have arrived in similar meteorological situations—those of September 1970 and October 1978—though at neither times were dust falls recorded, and one cannot necessarily link individual appearances to a particular weather pattern.

NORMAN ELKINS

18 Scotstarvit View, Cupar, Fife KY15 4DX

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## Diary dates

This list covers July 1986 to June 1987

**17th-23rd July** SOCIETY OF WILDLIFE ARTISTS' ANNUAL EXHIBITION (including display of winning entries in 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' and 'The Richard Richardson Award' competitions). The Mall Galleries, The Mall, London SW1. Open 10-5 Mon.-Fri., 10-1 Sat. Admission £1.00 (free to SWLA members).

**22nd July** BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB. Alan Tye on birds in Sierra Leone. Central London. Non-members should write (enclosing SAE) at least 21 days before to Hon. Secretary, R. E. F. Peal, 2 Chestnut Lane, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 3AR.

**12th-14th September** WADER STUDY GROUP ANNUAL CONFERENCE. Oatridge Agricultural College, Broxburn, near Edinburgh. Details from Nigel and Jacquie Clark, Zoology Department, West Mains Road, Edinburgh EH9 3JT.

**25th October** BTO/LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY ONE-DAY CONFERENCE. 'Winter Birds.' Details from Keith Betton, 36

Milton Road, Hampton, Middlesex TW12 2LJ.

**25th October** RSPB LONDON DAY AND AGM. Kensington and Chelsea Town Hall, London. Details from Mrs Marcella Hume, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

**31st October-2nd November** SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND AGM. Marine Hotel, North Berwick. Details from SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

**October** (provisional) BOU AUTUMN SCIENTIFIC MEETING. British Museum (Natural History). Dr Charig on 'Archaeopteryx—the forgery that never was.' Details from BOU, c/o Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY.

**14th-16th November** (provisional) IRISH WILDBIRD CONSERVANCY/BTO CONFERENCE. The Banba Hotel, Salthill, Galway. Details from IWC, Southview, Church Road, Greystones, Co. Wicklow, Ireland.



**22nd-23rd November** SCOTTISH RINGERS' CONFERENCE. The Landmark Centre, Carrbridge. Details from Highland Ringing Group, c/o SOC.

**25th November** BOC. Jeffery Boswall on 'Ornithology in China'. Central London. Write to Hon. Secretary.

**November** BTO/WEST WALES TRUST FOR NATURE CONSERVATION ONE-DAY CONFERENCE. Orierton Field Centre, Pembroke. Details from Tim Davis, BTO, Beech Grove, Tring, Hertfordshire HP23 5NR.

**5th-7th December** BTO ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND AGM. Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire. Witherby Memorial Lecture: 'The Bee-eaters' by Hilary Fry. Details from Tim Davis, BTO.

**5th-7th December** NATIONAL EXHIBITION OF CAGE AND AVIARY BIRDS. National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham. Details from Brian Byles, Editor, 'Cage and Aviary Birds', Surrey House, 1 Throwley Way, Sutton, Surrey SM4 4QQ.

**5th-28th December** EXHIBITION OF WORK BY WINNERS OF 'BIRD ILLUSTRATOR OF THE YEAR' AND 'THE RICHARD RICHARDSON AWARD' 1986. Stevenage Leisure Centre, Lytton Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire.

**8th December** BOU WINTER MEETING. Jointly with Fauna and Flora Preservation Society. 'The South Atlantic.' The Meeting Room, Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY, 6.30 p.m. (provisional). Details from BOU.

**13th December** ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB ANNUAL MEETING. Finsbury Library, London EC1. Details from OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

**9th-11th January** BTO RINGING AND MIGRATION CONFERENCE. Swanwick. Details from The Ringing Office, BTO.

**24th-25th January** YOUNG ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB GARDEN 'BIRD SURVEY. Details from YOC, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

**31st January** Closing date for entries for 'Bird Photograph of the Year'.

**31st January** Closing date for 'Best recent black-and-white bird-photographs'.

**27th February-1st March** RSPB/IRISH WILDBIRD CONSERVANCY ALL-IRELAND CONFERENCE. Slieve Donard Hotel, Newcastle, Co. Down. Details from RSPB Northern Ireland Office, Belvoir Park Forests, Belfast BT8 4QT.

**28th February** RSPB FILM PREMIÈRE. Royal Festival Hall, London.

**14th March** Closing date for entries for 'Bird Illustrator of the Year'.

**17th March-12th May** YOC MIGRATION PHONE-IN. Telephone Sandy (0767) 80551. Tuesdays only, 5.30 p.m.-7.00 p.m. Records from adults welcomed.

**28th March** BTO/BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BIRD CLUB ONE-DAY CONFERENCE. Details from Tim Davis, BTO.

**10th-12th April** 'BRITISH BIRDS'/BTO CONFERENCE. Swanwick. Details from Mrs Sheila Cobban, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ, or from Tim Davis, BTO.

**10th-12th April** RSPB MEMBERS' WEEKEND. University of Warwick. Details from Mrs Marcella Hume, RSPB.

**2nd-4th May** YOC/RSPB NATIONAL SPONSORED BIRDWATCH.

*Sheila D. Cobban, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ*

## Announcements

**Overseas bird tours survey** There are now many travel companies which provide special overseas tours for birdwatchers. Indeed, a number of companies—such as Birdquest, Cygnus Wildlife, Ornitholidays and Sunbird—specialise in such tours. Prices vary, even for trips with more-or-less the same itinerary, partly due to concessions from hotels, ground agents or airlines, but also depending upon the number of people on the trip and whether there is an accompanying ornithological leader (and whether he/she is a full-time professional, a freelance receiving a fee, or is providing his/her services to the travel company merely in exchange for a free, or reduced-price, holiday).

The popularity of these tours suggests that those who participate generally enjoy them and find them rewarding ornithologically. But which are the most reliably satisfactory companies? As a *British Birds* reader, you will want to go with a good leader to the right places at the right time of year at a reasonable price. Those *British Birds* readers who have already been on organised bird tours can give the necessary advice to help those wondering whether to book such a trip (and with which company).

We hope that anyone who has been on one or more overseas bird tours in the past ten years will complete the form on pages xi & xii and send it to us. The results will be published in *British Birds*, naming the bird tour companies (but *NOT* the leaders).

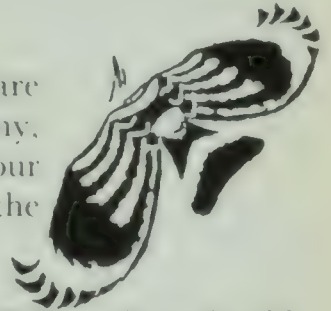
Everyone submitting a completed form will receive an advance copy of the survey results by post, before they are published in *British Birds*. Please send the form(s) to *Bird tour survey, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ*.

**Sponsorship for 'Bird Illustrator of the Year'** We are delighted to announce that the mail-order book company, Natural History Book Service, is now sponsoring our annual competition to find the 'Bird Illustrator of the Year'.

We are most grateful to the NHBS for this support.

Sponsorship is a great help to a magazine such as 'BB', and we should also like to take this opportunity to repeat our thanks to Matthew Gloag & Son Ltd, the proprietors of *The Famous Grouse* Scotch whisky, sponsors of our 'Bird Photograph of the Year' competition for the past six years, and to *ZEISS West Germany*, sponsors of the Rarities Committee.

The results of this year's 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' competition will be published next month, and the prize-winning entries will be on display with the annual exhibition of the Society of Wildlife Artists at The Mall Galleries in London during 17th-23rd July (see 'Diary dates' for further details).



**New books in British BirdShop** In addition to the continuing special offers concerning *The Frontiers of Bird Identification* and volumes I and II of *The Birds of Africa*, we can now also offer the following new books:

d'Aguilar & Dommanget *A Field Guide to the Dragonflies of Britain, Europe and North Africa* (Collins)

Cemnick *Black Robin Country: the Chatham Islands and its wildlife* (Hodder & Stoughton)

Jackman & Pearson *The Countryside in Winter* (Hutchinson)

Jackson *Bird Etchings: the illustrators and their books, 1655-1855* (Cornell UP)

Neal *The Natural History of Badgers* (Croom Helm)

Orians & Angell *Blackbirds of the Americas* (Univ. of Washington)

Skutch & Gardner *Life of the Woodpecker* (Croom Helm)

Please use the form on page xiii now.



# Requests

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**Colour-ringed White-tailed Eagles** An international programme for colour-ringing White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* was initiated in 1976 and now includes Sweden, Finland, Norway, the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic, Poland and the USSR. Anyone reporting a sighting of a colour-ringed White-tailed Eagle is promised a quick reply by the co-ordinator: Dr Björn Helander, SNF Helander, SNF/The Swedish Society for the Conservation of Nature, Box 6400, S-113 82 Stockholm, Sweden.

**Transparencies request** Anyone with high-quality colour transparencies of a 1985 rarity is asked to loan the originals to us for possible use (perhaps in colour) in the next rarities report. To be considered, transparencies must *arrive* with Dr J. T. R. Sharrock (Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ) before 1st July.

**Tree-roosting by Swifts** There are a few published observations of Swifts *Apus apus* roosting in trees (listed in Swedish with an English summary in *Anser* 2, 1986), but further observations are requested. Notes should include place, date, weather situation, times of beginning and end of watch, times of interesting events such as fly-ins or perching Swifts, and whether Swifts were adults or juveniles. Please send reports to Jan Holmgren, Rödhakevägen 23, S-274 00 Skurup, Sweden.

## News and comment

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*Mike Everett and Robin Prytherch*

**Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'**

**Congratulations, SOC!** A reception held at the Museum and Art Gallery, Kelvingrove, Glasgow, on 21st March marked the Golden Jubilee of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club—known affectionately to its 3,000 members, and many more besides, simply as 'the SOC'. This coincided with the publication of a most important contribution to British ornithological literature: Valerie Thom's *Birds in Scotland*—which will be fully reviewed in 'BB' shortly.

A 50-year roll-call from the SOC's membership would include some of the most distinguished names in British ornithology: the club takes a quiet pride in its many achievements and distinguished sons and daughters—but much of its strength really lies in a widespread and loyal membership,

brought together through its 13 local branches and of course via its Annual Conference which many 'foreigners' agree is the best of its kind in the UK, or anywhere else for that matter. Add the considerable emphasis placed on the word 'club', the excellent journal, *Scottish Birds*, and the superb reference library—named in memory of George Waterston—and bird bookshop, and you will begin to see how and why the SOC has such a pre-eminent place in British ornithology. Our very best wishes go to the Club for the next 50 years—and beyond!

**Change of Recorder** Michael Innes, 106A Queen's Street, Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, has taken over from Dr Mike Bell as Recorder for Grampian (excluding Moray).

**Lundy Warden** Congratulations to Neil Willcox, who was appointed the new Warden of Lundy on 6th February.



**160.** Neil Willcox, new Warden of Lundy  
(*The Lundy Company Ltd*)

**Wash NNR** On 25th February, the Nature Conservancy Council established the 212th National Nature Reserve—The Wash (Lutton Outmarsh) in Lincolnshire, some 100 ha of relatively mature saltmarsh lying outside an old sea-bank dating from 1865. The area is excellent for wildfowl and is an important addition to the chain of reserves established by various conservation bodies around the Wash. Further information from Bob Lord, NCC, Marsh Cottage, Marsh Road, Kirton, near Boston PE20 1LY, or from NCC East Midlands Regional Office, Northminster House, Peterborough PE20 1LY, or from NCC East Midlands Regional Office, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA; access is by permit only, obtainable from the latter address.

**Peregrinations** Stan Howe of *BP* has drawn our attention to what may be the best telex Ronald Reagan will get this year—in fact it could be the only one of its kind received by an administration not exactly noted for its positive approach to wildlife conservation matters . . . It is from the *Latin America Daily Post* in Rio de Janeiro and congratulates the USA on its efforts to restore its population of the Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*; this was prompted by the return for the third successive winter of a Peregrine to an apartment building in São Paulo, Brazil—in which a notable resident is Dalgas Frisch, Vice-president of Brazil's Association for the Preservation of Wildlife.

**Well done, BR!** Criticising our railways is a national pastime as important as jokes about the weather and not winning at most of the sports we invented and gave to the world—so it makes a pleasant change to give British Rail a well-deserved pat on the back. BR has just presented ten sites totalling 67 ha from its considerable landholdings to the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature for the RSN's British Wildlife Appeal. Several are SSSIs and several (including the largest, 20 ha on the Nene Washes) are of ornithological importance.

**Oxfordshire's breeding atlas** After one successful season's work, the organisers of this tetrad survey consider that 1986 is the survey's crucial year. If you can help with fieldwork, please contact Andrew Heryet, 109 Farmers Close, Witney, Oxfordshire OX8 6NR; phone Witney (0993) 5036.

**Mystery personality No. 1** See plate 161. Contributions for this new feature will be gratefully received.

**161.** Mystery personality 1. Who? Doing what? Where? Answer below  
(*Runsey*)  
Camera, Thailand, February 1986 (*Stephen*)  
Dennis Buisson changing the film in his





**Danish oil and birds** Licenses have been granted for exploratory drilling for oil in the shallow seas off Esbjerg on the west coast of Denmark. This appears to be a phenomenally important bird area: it is estimated to hold wintering numbers of 200,000 Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* (about 50% of those in western Europe) and 4,000-5,000 Red-throated/Black-throated Divers *Gavia stellata/arctica*. In late summer, 100,000-150,000 Common Scoters moult in the area. It is encouraging to learn that, in recognition of the ornithological importance of the area, the Danish Department of the Environment has commissioned the Danish Ornithological Society (Dansk Ornitologisk Forening) to undertake surveys of the wildfowl and other birds off the country's west coast. The society sent biologist Finn Danielsen to confer with the RSPB's Conservation Planning and Research Department over oil development technology and the best methods of surveying birds offshore (based on the RSPB's experience in the Moray Firth). Further developments are awaited with interest. (Contributed by Dr James Cadbury)

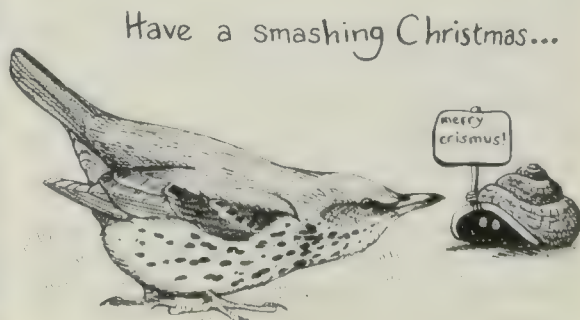
**20th All-Ireland Conference** It is always a pleasure to attend an Irish bird conference—and not just for the 'duty frees' on one's return. Their uncrowded programmes and relaxed atmospheres give them a spacious feel not always found in their British counterparts. The annual All-Ireland conservation conferences invariably have a central theme; the latest, held in Sligo during 28th February to 2nd March, was on the broad topic of birds and boglands. Roger Goodwillie opened the programme with a lament for Ireland's vanishing peatlands, fast disappearing in the face of commercial exploitation. John Wilson followed this with a status review of wintering Greenland Whitefronts, now increasingly concentrated in Co. Wexford as traditional sites elsewhere are rendered unusable. Richard Collins reported on his Mute Swan population study in and around Dublin, and Julian Greenwood summarised his work on Dunlin migration. Finally, Ron Macdonald showed that Cormorants are not the black sheep so often alleged by Irish fish stockists, provided salmonids are not released in great shoals whose conspicuousness will attract fish predators from far and wide. This was an interesting conference, with good lecturers, more beards per square yard than I have encountered before, and excellent Guinness.

*British Birds* was invited to supply the traditional mystery photographs competition, which attracted 33 entries, most of which correctly identified three or four of the birds in the five photographs. The only all-correct entry was from Killian Mullarney, who was presented with his bottle of champagne by BB's Alison Breach (Contributed by Robert Hudson)

**Good luck, Charles!** Charles Latimer, Managing Director of our printers, New-north-Burt Ltd, retired on 31st March, ending a long and happy relationship with *British Birds*. Charles always attended our Press receptions for 'Bird Photograph of the Year' and 'Bird Illustrator of the Year', and was proud of the praise which his firm's printing achievements with *British Birds* received from guests on such occasions. We wish him, and his wife Pamela, a long and enjoyable retirement in their new riverside home at St Neots.

**More howlers** So you thought the Great Grey Phalarope (*Brit. Birds* 79: 208-209) was the latest bird new to science? Think again! In recent months, more have been discovered, including the Black-winged Prating Cole (*Daily Telegraph*, 3rd February), the Spotted Redshank and Water Tail ('Conservation of Wild Birds', *European Communities Commission Background Report*) and what is probably, for fairly obvious reasons, Thailand's rarest bird, the Greater Shotted Eagle (*Bangkok Bird Club Bulletin*). Still more extinct species are being rediscovered too—see 'The Great Auk Wreck' (*Norfolk Bird Report*, 1983), which somehow the 'grapevine' dipped on . . .

**Christmas truce?** With Dr Henty's paper in this issue (see pages 277-281) we could not resist including the very appropriate cartoon from Norman McCanch's personal 1985 Christmas card (see below).



# Recent reports



*Keith Allsopp and Ian Dawson*

**These are largely unchecked reports, not authenticated records**

The dates in this report refer to March unless otherwise stated.

The high-pressure systems to the north of Britain and Ireland which brought the bitterly cold air in from Siberia during February began to weaken during the first days of March, and temperatures jumped 10°C on 4th when the mild Atlantic westerlies arrived. On 7th, pressure began rising to the south and east, and the winds turned more southwesterly. The next day two **Little Ringed Plovers** *Charadrius dubius* were found at Staines Reservoir (London), with subsequent also early records on 10th in Hampshire and north Buckinghamshire; **Wheatears** *Oenanthe oenanthe* and **Chiffchaffs** *Phylloscopus collybita* arrived in the Southwest, and on 9th **Sand Martins** *Riparia riparia* could be seen in Berkshire, **Garganeys** *Anas querquedula* in the south and Norfolk, a **Hoopoe** *Upupa epops* popped up in Guernsey (Channel Islands) with another being found on Tresco (Isles of Scilly) on 14th, a **Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus* at South Slob (Co. Wexford), and a noticeable migration was noted at Walney Island (Cumbria). The weather remained unsettled westerly as frontal systems crossed Britain and Ireland and further early birds arrived: a **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* at Kenfig (Mid Glamorgan) on 12th, and, by 16th, **Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis*, **Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus*, **Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*, **House Martin** *Delichon urbica* and **Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oedicephalus* had all been reported, followed by a **Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* at Portland (Dorset) on 20th and a **Hobby** *Falco subbuteo* at Dungeness (Kent) on 24th.

**Black Redstarts** *Phoenicurus ochruros*, an early migrant, had been noted on the East Coast from 6th, with six being found at Landguard Point (Suffolk) on 18th. From 21st, the high pressure declined to the east, and the tracks of the Atlantic lows moved south, with consequent strong west and northwest winds, and lower temperatures, inhibiting any further arrivals of summer visitors.

## Seabirds

A particularly deep depression brought very strong winds on 24th, but no significant seabird wrecks were reported. A flock of 200 **Kittiwakes** *Rissa tridactyla* collected below the Severn Bridge (Avon) on 23rd, with a similar number inland at gravel-pits near King's Lynn (Norfolk) the next day.



Quite an influx of **Bonaparte's Gulls** *Larus philadelphia* was reported: as well as the one at Drift and Newlyn (Cornwall) staying on into March, others were seen at Kenfig in mid month, Gilkicker Point (Hampshire) on 21st, Wexford Harbour from 24th and at Durlston Head (Dorset) on 31st. The appearance of a **Franklin's Gull** *L. pipixcan*





at Borth (Dyfed) in mid month corresponds nicely to Ireland's first record at North Bull (Co. Dublin) on 1st, reported last month.

Among the ten reports of **Ring-billed Gulls** *L. delawarensis* was one inland at Throckmorton (Hereford & Worcester) and the one at Newcastle (Tyne & Wear) (plates 162 & 163), noted last month. The **Laughing Gull** *L. atricilla* also continued to entertain at Newcastle, as did the **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* at Holyhead, Anglesey (Gwynedd), and **Pomarine Skuas** *Stercorarius pomarinus* were still being seen along the East Coast (note the request for records, *Brit. Birds* 79: 261). The 21 **Glaucous Gulls** *Larus hyperboreus* at Killybegs (Co. Donegal) on 23rd was an exceptional number for this winter, but the westerly gales at that time were perhaps the concentrating factor as numbers were low elsewhere, as were those of

**Iceland Gulls** *L. glaucoides*. A notable concentration of six **Mediterranean Gulls** *L. melanocephalus* was reported from Sinah Gravel-pits, Hayling Island (Hampshire), at the end of the month. A rare sight was another concentration: of 122 **Great Crested Grebes** *Podiceps cristatus* off the Cumbrian shore of the Solway Firth on 9th for one day only, presumably a return movement after the bad weather. Inland **Red-necked Grebes** *P. grisegena* included one at Wath Ings (North Yorkshire) (plate 164). Two **Guillemots** *Uria aalge* were present at Barnes Bridge on the River Thames (Surrey) (plate 165). Nine **Red-throated Divers** *Gavia stellata* in the River Thames off Purfleet (Essex) were also notable, on 28th February, and the **White-billed Diver** *G. adamsii* at Ardglass (Co. Down) could still be seen on 15th.



**162 & 163.** Second-winter Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*, Tyne & Wear, February 1986  
(left, Daniel M. Turner; above P. J. Dunn)

### Birds of prey

The bird of the month was undoubtedly a white-phase **Gyr Falcon** *Falco rusticolus* which was found at Berry Head (Devon) on 31st. The discovery of its roosting site enabled many birdwatchers to study this magnificent bird, rather than having to wait for a split-second glimpse. Not to be outdone, the Irish reported their own Gyr Falcon at North Slob (Co. Wexford) on 1st April. Also in Ireland,

there was a **Rough-legged Buzzard** *Buteo lagopus* in north Antrim on 17th. This month there were an unusual number of records of **Red Kite** *Milvus milvus* outside Wales: at the Lodge, Sandy (Bedfordshire), on 15th, at Oxford and at Titchfield Haven (Hampshire) on 16th, in Northamptonshire on 23rd, and at Ballycastle (Co. Antrim). Returning **Ospreys** *Pandion haliaetus* were also more evident than usual, with reports from Inver-

**164.** Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*, North Yorkshire, March 1986 (John Hewitt)





ness (Highland) on 13th, Portglanone (Co. Antrim) on 23rd, Sandy on 26th, in East Anglia on 29th, with the most famous site at Loch Garten (Highland) being occupied once more on 31st. Two notable reports of **Short-eared Owls** *Asio flammeus* were from the Tame Valley (Warwickshire), where 16 was the estimated wintering population, and from Langstone Harbour, where six were seen on 10th.

### Waders and wildfowl

Wintering Nearctic waders still included the **Least Sandpiper** *Calidris minutilla* at Porthscatho (Cornwall), two **Long-billed Dowitchers** *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, one at Curbridge (Hampshire) and the other on Guernsey, and a **White-rumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis* at Sandwich Bay (Kent) on 10th. An estimated 12,000 **Bar-tailed Godwits** *Limosa lapponica* was an exceptional count for Snettisham (Norfolk) on 2nd, and 24 **Green Sandpipers** *Tringa ochropus* was also an exceptional wintering number at Purwell (Hertfordshire). Most of the rarer wildfowl reports referred to established winterers; the three **Surf Scoters** *Melanitta perspicillata* in Largo Bay (Fife) and the one on the North Wales coast remained throughout the month, and three more were seen at Rosslare (Co. Wexford) on 30th. Long stayers were the **King Eiders** *Somateria spectabilis* at Porthscatho and Tayport (Fife), the **Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* at Ash Vale Gravel-pits (Surrey/Hampshire) until 19th, and the **American Black Duck** *Anas rubripes* at Tynningham (Lothian). New reports were of **American Wigeons** *A. americana* on Guernsey and at Blacktoft (Humberside) in late March, and a **Teal** *A. crecca* of the Nearctic race *carolinensis* at Cley (Norfolk) from 11th to 15th. Interesting

February reports recently received were of a **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* at Sinah Gravel-pits on 20th and counts of 180 **Ruddy Ducks** *Oxyura jamaicensis* and 3,000 **Pochards** *Aythya ferina* at Rostherne Mere (Cheshire). With the change to milder weather, the numbers of inland **Smews** *Mergus albellus* dropped, but the total at Horton Gravel-pits (Berkshire) reached 16 on 8th before their departure. On the Kent Estuary (Lancashire), the numbers of **Whooper Swans** *Cygnus cygnus* reached a high of 42 on 6th. Twenty **Bean Geese** *Anser fabalis* were rare visitors to Kingsbury Water Park (Warwickshire) from 15th to 25th, and three others were found at Holkham (Norfolk) on 15th. Nine **White-fronted Geese** *Anser albifrons* of the Greenland race *flavirostris* called in at Slimbridge (Gloucestershire) between 6th and 16th, and three flocks, of 48, 41, and 23, could be found on Orkney.

### Very odd passerine records

A bird picked up dead in Rhyl (Clwyd) on 26th December 1985, and consigned to a freezer, was finally identified as a **Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica* when examined in March. An Oxford cat, surprisingly unknowledgeable, killed a **Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica* on 11th February. Ringers netting Reed Buntings *Emberiza schoeniclus* at a roost near Winchester (Hampshire) on 23rd found that one of the birds in the hand was a **Little Bunting** *E. pusilla*. A **Woodlark** *Lullula arborea* was a good record at Cley on 14th, a **Serin** *Serinus serinus* passed through Sandwich Bay on 7th, and three **Lapland Buntings** *Calcarius lapponicus* were an interesting find at Bedford Pools (Hereford & Worcester) on 17th. The **Two-barred Crossbill** *Loxia leucoptera* at Carran Valley (Central) continued to be seen into April,

165. Guillemots *Uria aalge*, Surrey, March 1986 (Andrew V. Moon)



and there was at least one **Waxwing** *Bombus garrulus* at Bexley (Kent) in March.

### Latest news

Even by mid May, some summer migrants (e.g. **Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur* and **Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*) still very scarce. A few southern and eastern rarities: **Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus*, two **Bee-eaters** *Merops apiaster* and two **Woodchat Shrikes** *Lanius senator* at Portland, and **Alpine Swift** *Apus melba* at Beachy Head. Trips of up to 23 **Dotterels** *Charadrius morinellus* in The Fens.



## Short reviews

**The Oxford Dictionary of Natural History.** Edited by Michael Allaby. (OUP, 1985. £20.00) Despite three years at university studying botany, two studying zoology, and a further three researching in ecology, 90% of the words in this dictionary are still totally unknown to me. Even after reading the definitions, I am little the wiser in many cases. This is not the book in which to look up the meaning of 'rut' or 'gonys' (neither is included). The definition of 'imago' is not very helpful, since it defines it as 'The fully developed adult among pterygote insects', but 'pterygote' does not merit an entry. These are just examples from a book with a title suggesting that it might be of use to the amateur naturalist, but which in reality is far more likely to be of value to the professional scientist. There are no illustrations (perhaps not expected in a dictionary, but many books called dictionaries these days are really well-illustrated encyclopedias). **Birds Beyond Belfast: a guide for birdwatchers.** By Belfast RSPB Members' Group. (RSPB, 1985. Paperback £2.95) This 118-page paperback is a companion volume to the 66-page *Birds Around Belfast* published in 1981. Both have been produced by the Belfast RSPB Members' Group, and together they cover the whole of Northern Ireland. After a foreword by Bill Oddie, the well-known foreword writer, and an introduction and acknowledgments, the text is divided into the six counties, within each of which are set out the various birdwatching localities, shown on accompanying maps. For each locality are set out details of location, access, habitat, birds and items of general interest. The text is enlivened by line-drawings by Rob Hume.

This is a well-produced, clearly laid out booklet, with accurate and up-to-date information, despite a rather unprepossessing cover. The Belfast Members' Group is to be congratulated on an excellent job. [TONY MARR] **Kennzeichen und Mauser Europäischer Singvögel.** By Hans Bub. (Die Neue Brehm-Bücherei 570. A. Ziemsen Verlag, 1985. DM23.40) These 200-plus pages and 106 illustrations provide a general insight into the subject of characters and moults of European songbirds, following the three previously published parts dealing with 58 species (*Brit. Birds* 77: 637-638). Eighteen chapters by a total of 19 authors cover a very wide range of topics—geographical variation, feather morphology, causes and effects of moult, ageing, etc—including a 'rare' one on the brood-patch. All extremely useful, despite the (in places) rather tortuous German style. [DAC] **Black Robin Country: the Chatham Islands and its wildlife.** By David Cemmick and Dick Veitch. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1985. Paperback £14.95) The Black Robin *Petroica traversi* is one of (if not the) rarest birds in the world (see *Brit. Birds* 77: 575). This 130-page large-format paperback illustrates it and the other wildlife of the Chatham Islands (870 km west of New Zealand), with superb paintings by David Cemmick and text by David Veitch. Very evocative; a delightful book. **Wildlife in Towns and Cities, Gardens, Parks and Waterways.** By Michael Chinery and W. G. Teagle. (Country Life Books, 1985. Paperback £5.95) It really is quite useful to have a field guide covering all the groups of animals and plants that the general naturalist is likely to come across indoors and outdoors in urban areas.



The species included are, of course, only a selection of what might be found, but the text is authoritative and the illustrations helpful and attractive. **God's Acre: the flowers and animals of the parish churchyard.** By **Francesca Greenoak.** (Orbis, 1985. £12.95) Britain's 20,000 churchyards mean 20,000 acre-sized nature reserves (a total of 8,000 ha), providing sanctuary for an astonishing variety of plants and animals. Francesca Greenoak writes of the history and natural history of these ancient enclosures throughout the length of Britain, giving an eloquent plea for their conservation as microcosms of a countryside under threat. Her own research was helped by that of the members of Britain's Women's Institutes, who were dragooned into making wildlife surveys of their local churchyards: useful involvement of hundreds of potential conservationists. This is a delightful book, scarcely a page without at least one of Clare Robert's delicate drawings, mostly of flowers, shrubs or trees, but also of insects, mammals, particular churchyards and, occasionally, birds. [ROBERT GILLMOR] **The Dragonflies of Great Britain and Ireland.** 2nd edn. By **Cyril O. Hammond; revised by Robert Merritt.** (Harley Books, 1985. Paperback £9.75) It is very useful to have a relatively cheap paperback edition of this 116-page classic. The 20 colour plates depict 44 species, for which there are also standard Biological Records Centre dot-distribution maps. There is also an 18-page key to the identification of larvae. Essential for anyone interested in dragonflies and damselflies. **The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Vermont.** Edited by **Sarah B. Laughlin and Douglas B. Kibbe.** (University Press of New England, 1985. £37.50) The first North American breeding bird atlas to appear, this 456-page volume adopts the conventional system of recording each species confirmed, probably and possibly breeding on a grid basis. It differs, however, from the European atlases published to date in that the organisers recognised, following a pilot survey in 1976, that it would not be possible to cover every one of the approximately 1,000 25-km squares into which the state was divided. As a result they used a selective sampling system based on one priority square selected randomly from each group of six squares. In addition to the 179 priority squares chosen by this method, an extra 24 squares containing unique and fragile habitats were surveyed, though records were accepted and published for all squares. The success of this

project illustrates how the use of sample squares can enable ornithological groups in sparsely populated areas to carry out atlas surveys. [C. D. HUTCHINSON] **Physiological Strategies in Avian Biology.** By **J. G. Phillips, P. J. Butler and P. J. Sharp.** (Blackie, 1985. Hardback £19.95; paperback £9.95) Introductory review of the subject by distinguished non-ornithologists for advanced undergraduates, but also claimed to provide commentary for informed amateur ornithologists. *BB* readers would certainly learn from this text, although the biochemistry left me gasping. Chapters on locomotion, migration and thermoregulation are the most readable, but surely the publishers cannot justify the expense of the hardback. [NORMAN ELKINS] **Birds of the Norfolk Broads.** (Jarrold, 1985. Paperback 90p) An interesting, good-quality booklet, with some very good colour photographs of Broadland birds. The text is generally informative, about both the bird-life and the habitats. For the serious student of Broadland, it is too brief, but at only 90p it is ideal for tourists as an introduction to this threatened environment. [D. J. HOLMAN] **Der Indische Brillenvogel.** By **Frank L. Radicke.** (Die Neue Brehm-Bücherei 572. A. Ziemsen Verlag, 1985. Paperback DM13.00) About 100 pages on the Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa*, mostly behaviour and breeding biology, based on the author's extensive studies of captive birds (eight males, five females, and their offspring). A four-page table shows the development of the young from day 1 to day 30 (the eye-ring begins to show at 14-15 days and is fully developed at 22-23). The biology of *Zosterops* in the wild is very little known. May this excellent book stimulate field research! [DAC] **Vertebrate Flight: a bibliography to 1985.** By **Jeremy M. V. Rayner.** (University of Bristol Press, 1985. Paperback £5.75) This 182-page softback lists some 2,500 references to the mechanics, physiology, ecology, morphology and anatomy of flight mechanisms of birds, bats, pterodactyls, gliding reptiles, gliding mammals and flying fish. **Monterey Birds: status and distribution of birds in Monterey County, California.** By **Don Roberson.** (Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society, 1985. \$16.00). Monterey County boasts some of the best birding in North America and a list of 427 species: the status of each is described, together with an at-a-glance occurrence bar-chart. Also much other useful information, including seven

recommended birding routes, an extensive bibliography, and details of the famous seabird-watching in Monterey Bay. This very attractive book (59 of its 81 plates in colour) is an absolute must for any birder visiting this or nearby parts of California.

[PJG] **The Effects of Oil on Birds: a multi-discipline symposium. 1982 Proceedings. Edited by Don Rosie and Stephen N. Barnes.** (Tri-State Bird Rescue & Research, Inc., 1983. Paperback £11.00) The 17 papers cover a wide range of studies, from veterinary analysis of the physiological effects of oil, especially on ducks and gulls, to the rehabilitation of affected birds and the use of post-mortem examinations as a research tool. One paper illustrates the effect on populations: that of the Esso Bernicia oilspill at Shetland in 1978. Discussion on sub-lethal effects of oil on reproductive success brings together a broad range of studies. Most papers relate to work in the USA, but all have excellent references. Those on conditions for bird hospitals and rehabilitation should be of special interest in the UK. [PETER MORGAN] **A Tour of British Bird Reserves. By Valerie Russell.** (Crowood Press, 1986. £12.95.) Of the 3,000 nature reserves in Britain, some 50 are described on the basis of short—often one-day (or shorter)—visits. Snettisham RSPB Reserve is illustrated by an Arctic Skua on its nest, Cley Marshes by an adult summer Red-throated Diver (from the calmness of the water, surely on a breeding lochan) and Hickling Broad National Nature Reserve by a photograph of a Greenshank which 'on a better day we might have seen'. The impression is almost of a bundle of photographs randomly scattered—often inappropriately—throughout the book. There is even that classic error of a Treecreeper photograph apparently

misaligned by 90°. The idea of this book was a good one, and the brief word-pictures of the reserves do give some of the flavour of the places which I know well, but the task was really too great for one person, and a better book would have been produced by having a team of regional authors. **Der Kampfläufer. By Horst Scheuffler and Arnd Stiefel.** (Die Neue Brehm-Bücherei 574. A. Ziemsen Verlag, 1985. Paperback, DM24.00) Based on a very comprehensive review of the world literature, this compact East German paperback details, with the aid of photographs, a wealth of information on all aspects of the biology of the Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*. It is a pity that such a publication is unlikely to be readily available or translated into English, and thus will not be read by many British birders. Anyone interested in monographs, waders in general, or Ruffs in particular should make a special effort to read this book. [BOB SCOTT] **Der Zug Europäischer Singvögel: ein Atlas der Wiederfunde beringter Vögel. Part 4. By Gerhardt Zink.** (Vogelwarte Radolfzell, 1985. DM76.00) This large-format atlas of ringing recoveries is wholly in German (a language in which I flounder and then sink), but this must still be regarded as an essential part of any serious ornithologist's reference collection. The maps are large and clear, and easily understood. In its four parts, this atlas maps the migration routes of 95 species of European passerines, with over 16,000 ringing recoveries plotted on 535 maps. This Part, for instance, contains no fewer than 39 maps plotting ringing recoveries of Pied Flycatchers *Ficedula hypoleuca* (only one of the 14 species covered in this Part). Unless migration bores you, you should look at a copy; if you look at one, you will probably want to own it.

*Dr J. T. R. Sharrock, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ*

## Reviews

**The Countryside in Winter. By Brian Jackman. Illustrated by Bruce Pearson.** Hutchinson, London, 1985. 160 pages; 105 colour illustrations. £12.95.

For the six winter months, Brian Jackman takes us around Britain, returning regularly to his west Dorset village to chronicle the cycle of winter on his own doorstep. He is a knowledgeable and eloquent guide, but if there is another who can tell even more he will team up for a day in



the field. With Roger Lovegrove, on a cold January day in Wales, he watched 30 Red Kites coming to roost, more than Roger had ever seen in a day in 20 years of birdwatching in Wales. His day spent with Dick Treleven on the cliffs of north Cornwall to look at Peregrines makes a stirring finish to March, and to the book.

Brian Jackman's word pictures of the countryside in winter are marvellously complemented by Bruce Pearson's paintings. There are over one hundred, including 12 double spreads and 13 full-page pictures. Bruce's work for this book further enhances his rapidly growing reputation as one of our very best all-round natural history painters. Like Jackman, he has gone out into the field in all weathers, and his pictures have the authenticity of being drawn from life. How right we were to make him the 'BB' Bird Illustrator of the Year in 1984! His mammals are equally good, and the landscapes that grace these pages are cold and windswept, painted with an ability to recreate the texture of wet mud or dank woodland.

This beautifully written and illustrated book celebrates the richness of wild country and wildlife that can still be found in our islands, but at the same time shows how fragile it is and how much we owe to those who devote their lives to its conservation. ROBERT GILLMOR

**Bird Etchings: the illustrators and their books, 1655-1855.** By Christine E. Jackson. Cornell University Press, 1985. 292 pages; four colour plates; 76 black-and-white illustrations. \$60.50.

Covering the period from 1655 to the mid nineteenth century, this handsomely produced and well-illustrated volume is a scholarly account of the writers and artists of bird books, published in Britain, whose illustrations were reproduced by etched metal plates. The story, which documents the development of ornithology, is built around 16 amateur naturalists from Willughby and Ray to Audubon, and is fascinating reading. We learn much of the personal as well as professional life of each man and dealings with patrons, clients and collectors, as well as each other. Most of the artists etched their own plates, and there was quite a do-it-yourself cottage industry of book production.

Christine Jackson makes a well-timed appeal for the books they produced to be preserved in their entirety and not broken up for the sake of their plates. Her book will help to support those who regard such scarce books as a valuable heritage of knowledge and art which should be as carefully protected as other masterpieces of our past.

*Bird Etchings* is a must for all interested in the history of ornithology and its associated art.

ROBERT GILLMOR

**Blackbirds of the Americas.** By Gordon H. Orians. Illustrated by Tony Angell. University of Washington Press, Seattle & London, 1985. 163 pages; 82 drawings. \$24.95.

The 94 species of American blackbirds, comprising the family Icteridae, are structurally rather homogeneous, but marvellously varied in their ecology and social organisation. In this outstanding book, Gordon Orians, the foremost research worker on the family, uses them as a basis for discussion of many fundamental questions which have concerned avian biologists in recent years—spacing and territoriality, optimal foraging theory, mating patterns, nest parasitism and vocal communication. His writing is lucid, authoritative, and quite free of jargon. As an introduction to social aspects of bird biology, the book cannot be bettered. The drawings by Tony Angell are fresh and lively, if a bit angular and spiky. Highly recommended.

DAVID SNOW

**Life of the Woodpecker.** By Alexander F. Skutch. Illustrated by Dana Gardner. Croom Helm, London, 1986. 136 pages: 61 colour plates. £45.00.

Alexander Skutch, doyen of tropical American ornithologists, has long had a special interest in woodpeckers. In this attractively produced book, he ranges over the whole family, with emphasis on New World species, giving a wealth of information not easy to obtain except by reference to the original, very scattered sources. The paintings by Dana Gardner are generally excellent and well reproduced. An expensive book, not for those who need a full systematic treatment (recently provided by Lester L. Short's *Woodpeckers of the World*, 1982), but for the general ornithologist with an interest in life history and behaviour.

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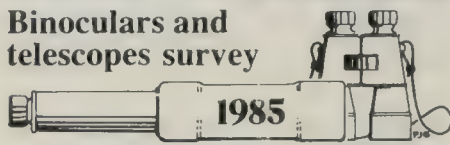
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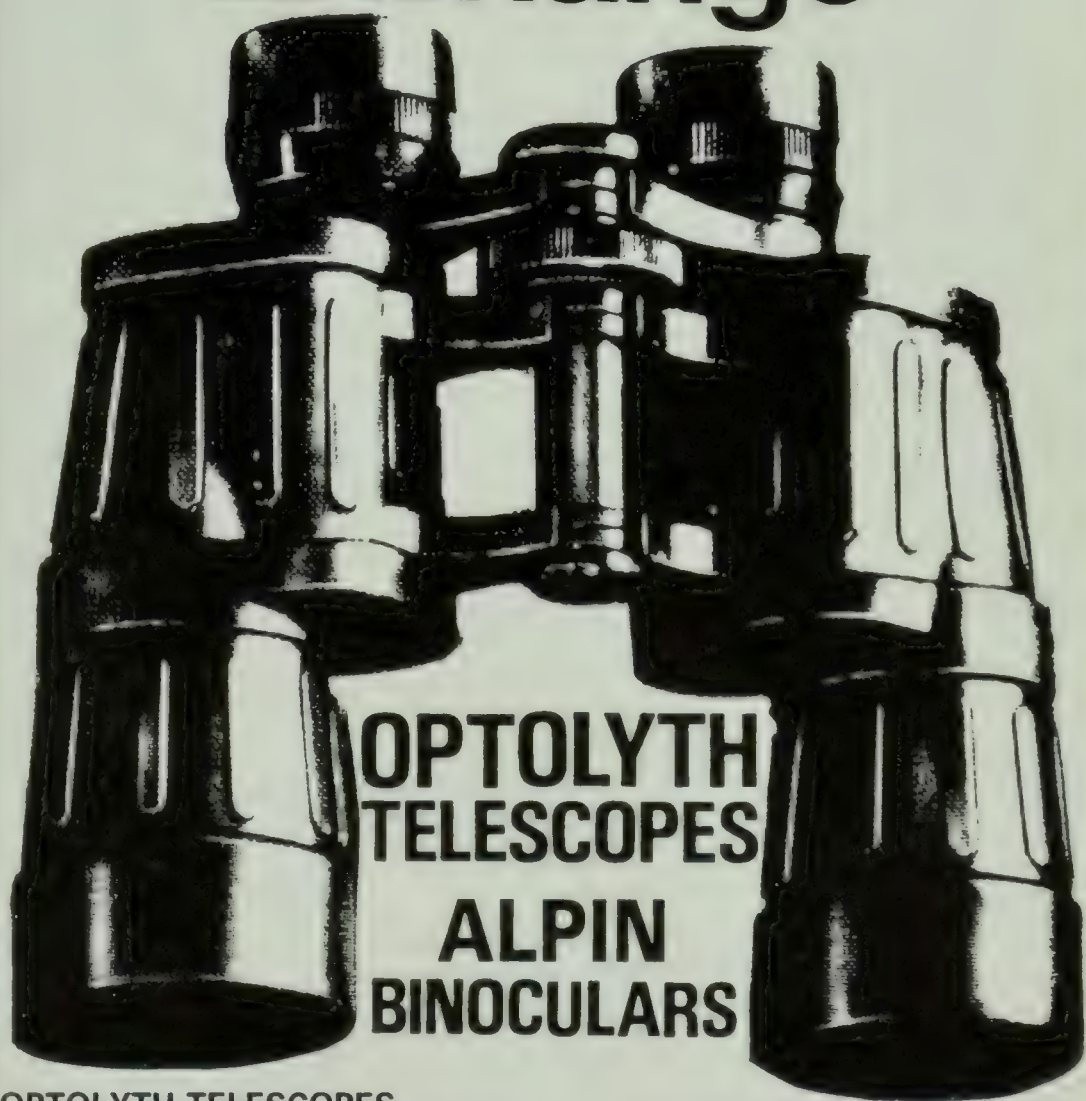
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*Publishing Manager,  
Production & Promotion*

**Dr J. T. R. Sharrock**

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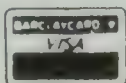
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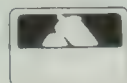
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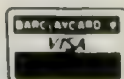
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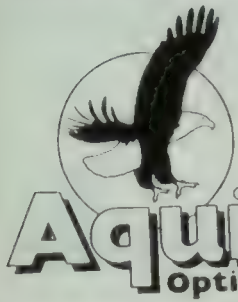
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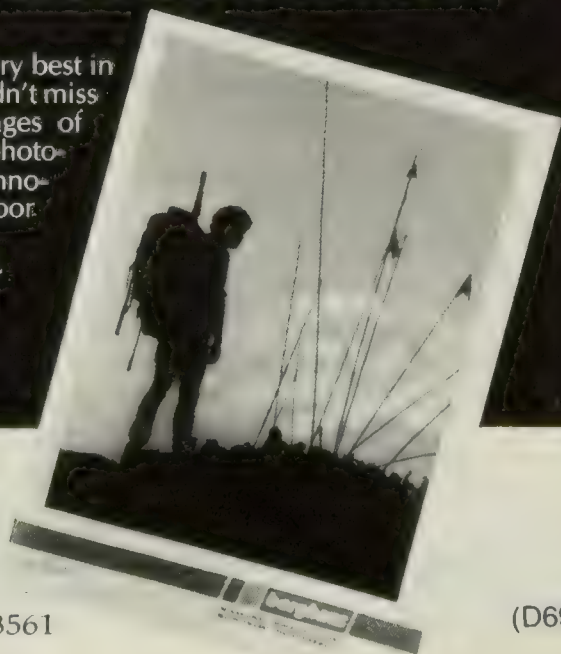


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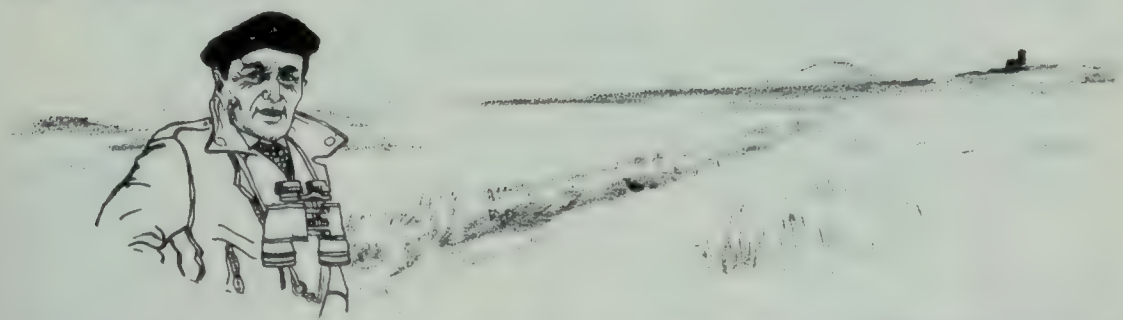
# British Birds

VOLUME 79 NUMBER 7 JULY 1986

*Sponsors of 'Bird Illustrator  
of the Year'*



## 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' and 'The Richard Richardson Award'



**I**t is of special note that this year, for the first time, our 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' competition is sponsored by the Natural History Book Service. This support by the NHBS is greatly welcomed.

The total of 64 artists submitting entries for this year's awards was the highest since the first competition eight years ago. The number of entries for the Richard Richardson Award was, however, only one above last year. We should like to see this number growing, as we are sure there is much young talent to be encouraged. The winners were as follows:

### **BIRD ILLUSTRATOR OF THE YEAR, 1986**

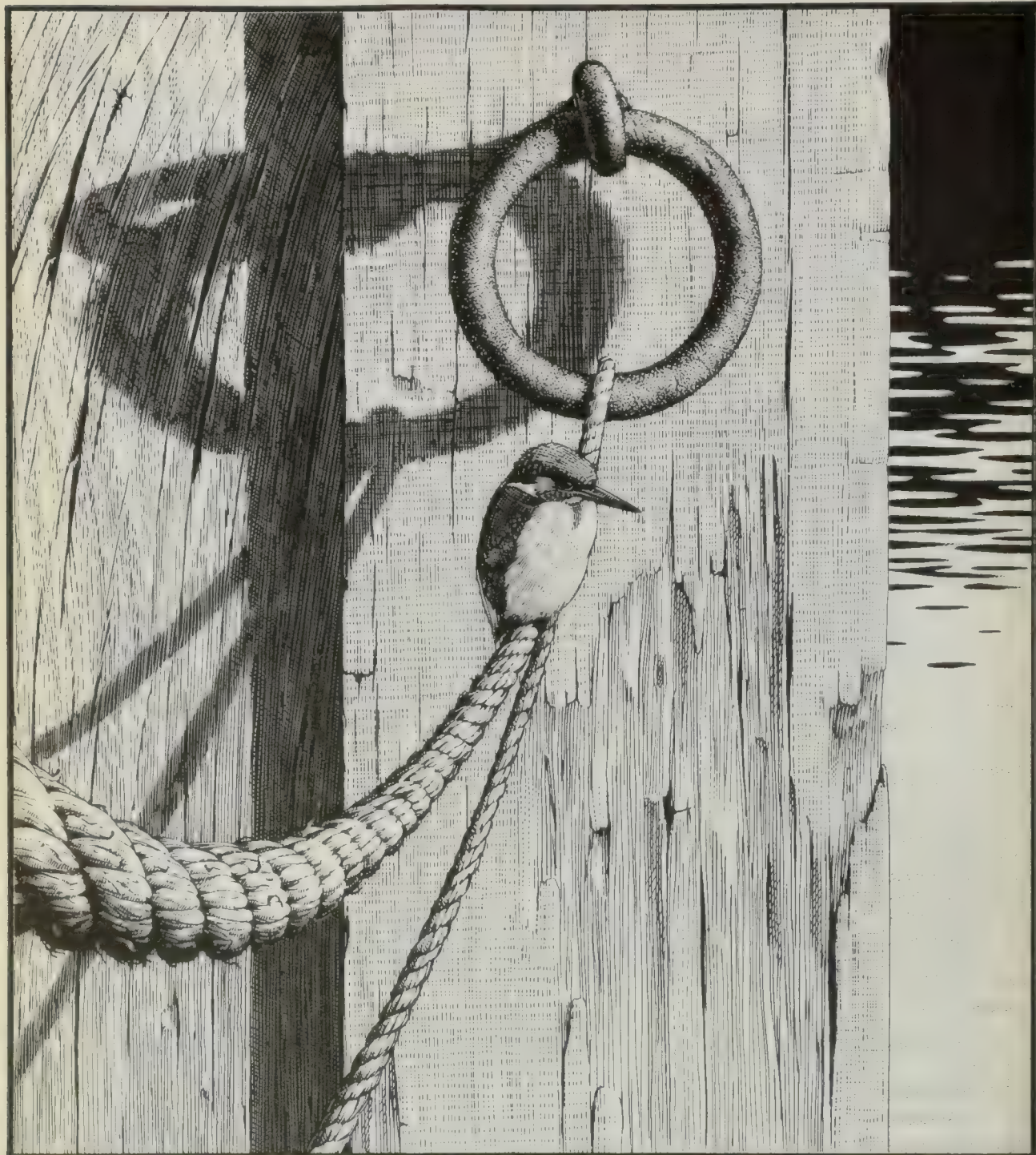
- 1st Chris Rose (Weymouth, Dorset)
- 2nd Nik Borrow (London)
- 3rd John Davis (Sidlesham, West Sussex)

### **THE RICHARD RICHARDSON AWARD, 1986**

- 1st Timothy Hinley (Middlesbrough, Cleveland)

It was tight at the top, with a very high standard of entries by all the artists in our rather long short-list: Martin Hallam, R. A. Hume, H. A. Knott, E. J. Leahy, David Mitchell, W. Neill, Nicholas Pike, D. R. Powell, Philip Snow and Andrew Stock.



Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (Chris Rose)

Chris Rose's crisp, clean handling of scraperboard has impressed us in previous competitions, and he was placed unofficial joint fourth in 1984. This year, he produced two cover designs, one of which appears on the front of this issue and will be the frontispiece to volume 79. We thought that this drawing of a Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*, dwarfed by the gnarled bole of an old tree, was the best of all those submitted this year. The great knobbly growths on the trunk contrast with the delicate new twigs springing up at the left. The whole makes a powerful image for a cover design. His drawing of Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* is an admirable example of what is required *inside* the magazine. Chris Rose's



Northern Parula *Parula americana* (Nik Borrow)

second cover drawing, reproduced here, is a daring composition, with the Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* a small part of the picture, but the scale is right. There is a rich range of textures: grainy wood, rusty metal, worn rope and smooth, oily water. The curving shadows add variety to a bold, abstract pattern of shapes and tones, making up a design which attracts the eye and demands attention.

Nik Borrow, who was 3rd in 1981 and who has always been well up among the leading artists, has this year reached his highest placing. We like his particular individual style of black-and-white drawing, admirably represented by his illustrations of Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*





Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* and Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* (Nik Borrow)

and Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*. The cover design of a Northern Parula *Parula americana* is in great contrast to those of the other winners, but contains some excellent drawing and penmanship.

When our elimination process finally leaves three or four sets of drawings from which the winners will be selected, we become very critical of the smallest points of detail. The left wing of John Davis's Barn Owl *Tyto alba*, reproduced here, can be faulted, although the general effect of the drawing is most appealing. His rich, dark drawing of two Snipes *Gallinago gallinago* will appear on a future cover.

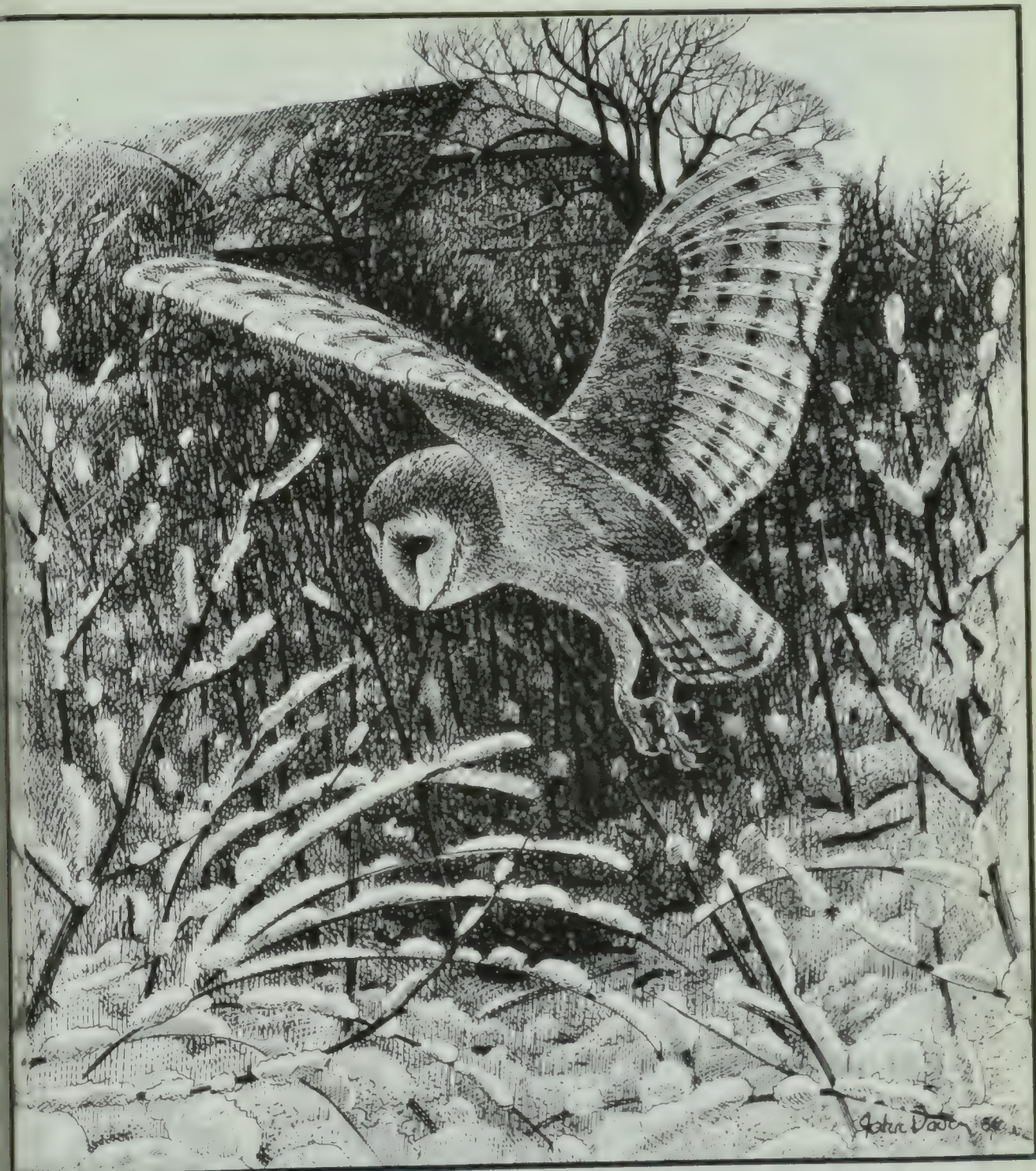
The illustrations by Timothy Hinley, winner of the Richard Richardson Award for artists aged under 21, were done in the finest detail of carefully dotted tones and textures—some perhaps too fine for good reproduction after reduction. His birds are placed in intimate settings or landscapes which work well, something not always achieved by his seniors. Despite the small entry (only 11 artists this year), we were pleased to find a generally higher standard of entries for the RRA, and short-listed Julian Hough and Derek Robertson.

Regrettably, more drawings than usual were done at the wrong size, which automatically disqualifies the artist. We found one precise copy of a photograph, and suspected others. The slavish copy of a photo often reveals a lack of understanding of what is going on in the dishevelled plumage of an

Coots *Fulica atra* (John Davis)





Barn Owl *Tyto alba* (John Davis)

individual bird, or how the feet really are when partly lost in shadow. A photo often stops a bird in mid movement, making it assume a position which, while acceptable in the photograph, looks quite wrong in a drawing.

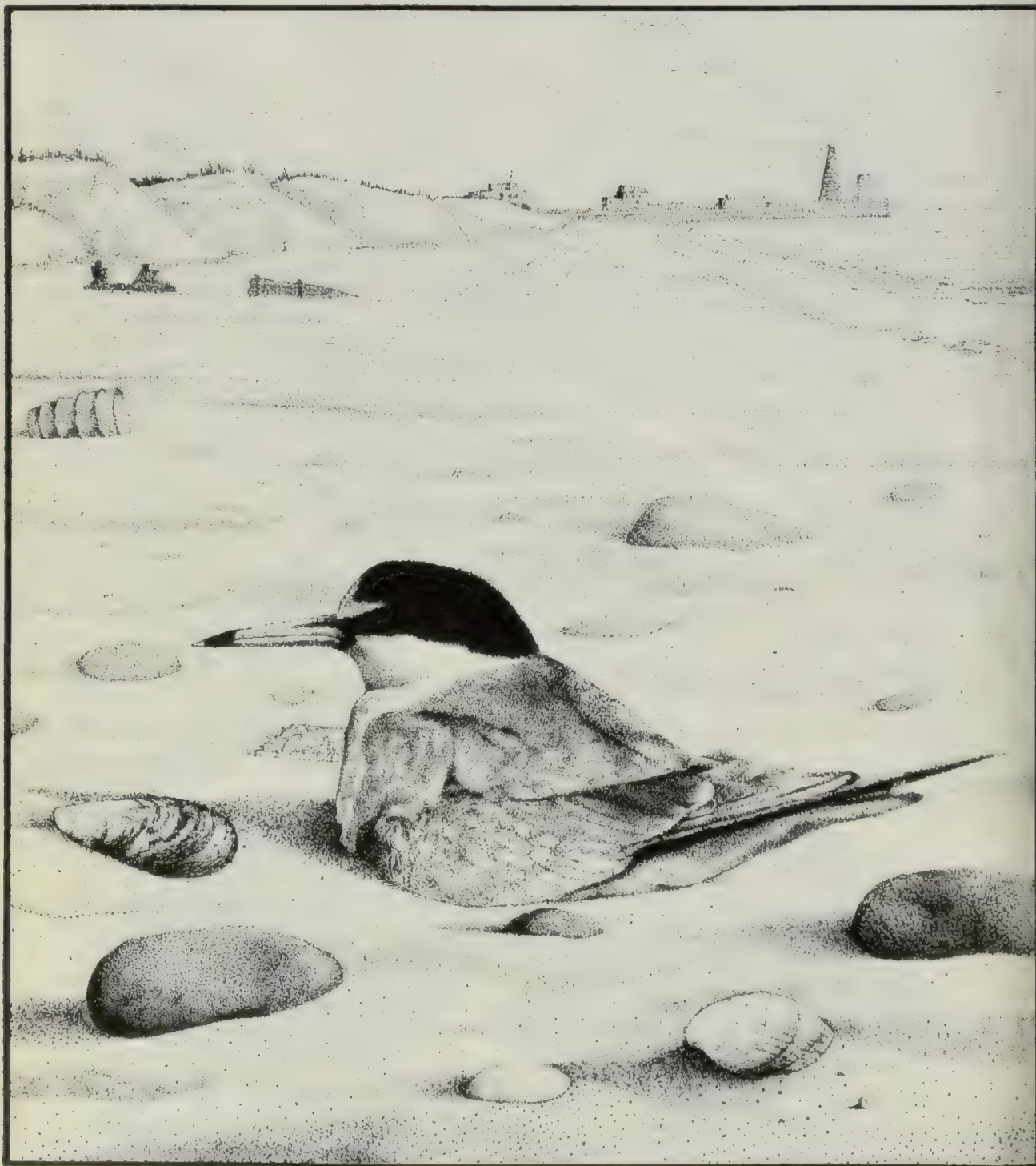
Although the actual subject is the least important aspect of the drawing, we are always surprised and pleased by the variety of subjects chosen. The 256 drawings this year covered 170 species. The most popular, with six apiece, were Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, and Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*, followed by Coot *Fulica atra*, Barn Owl and Kingfisher with five each.



Most of *BB*'s covers in the coming year, and many of the illustrations inside, will be drawings selected from entries to BIY. Among the cover pictures is one by Martin Hallam which takes the bold black-and-white pattern of a Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer* as the starting point for an abstract design. In another, John Hollyer makes skilful use of artificial tints in a drawing, full of lively movement, of an Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* chasing Common Terns *Sterna hirundo*.

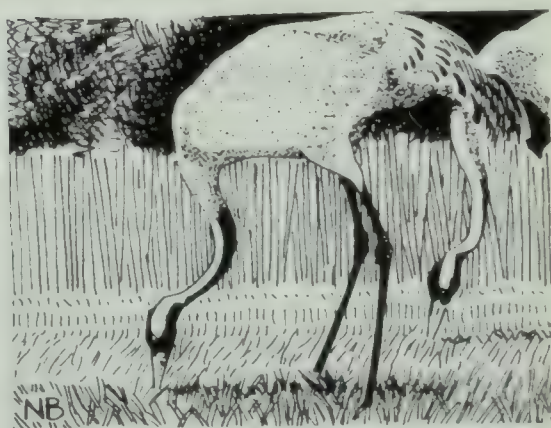
All the entries by the winners will be exhibited throughout the 23rd

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* (T. Hinley)





Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* (Chris Rose)



Cranes *Grus grus* (Nik Borrow)



Little Stint *Calidris minuta* (T. Hinley)

Annual Exhibition of the Society of Wildlife Artists at the Mall Galleries, The Mall, London SW1, during 17th-23rd July 1986. (Please note the amended dates.) We feel that this link between *BB* and the SWLA is of benefit to both organisations and to the artists whose work is exhibited.

ROBERT GILLMOR, KEITH SHACKLETON and J. T. R. SHARROCK





# Reactions of birds to heavy rain

R. A. Hume

A note by myself and another by David A. Christie on the reactions of wildfowl and waders to rain and hail (*Brit. Birds* 77: 20-21), with a request for other observations on the subject, stimulated a further 11 notes describing the behaviour of birds in such conditions. This summary has been compiled at the request of the Editorial Board of *British Birds*.

Kennedy (1970) reviewed the rather meagre information then available, and detailed the disadvantages of wetting to a bird. Replacement of the trapped air within the plumage of a bird by water increases the rate of heat loss from the body. The smaller the bird, the greater the surface area relative to the volume, so the greater is the disadvantage. If the air temperature is low, resistance to wetting, and subsequent cooling, and recovery afterwards, are impaired. Effectively, the most damage is done to small birds in cold weather (leaving aside the other problems—of finding food, for example—posed by adverse conditions).

That birds adopt a posture with head withdrawn, bill pointed towards the rain, body rather upright and feathers sleeked, to prevent water penetrating the plumage, is well known, but, as Kennedy showed, poorly documented. An interesting observation of Curlews *Numenius arquata* standing upright, with heads hunched and tails drooped to allow water to run off, was illustrated by C. F. Tunnicliffe, and reproduced in Niall (1980). J. Graham (*in litt.*) reports a mixed flock of Least Sandpipers *Calidris minutilla* and Semipalmated Sandpipers *C. pusilla* on Grand Cayman, West Indies, on 22nd February 1983, which stopped feeding, stood close together and raised their bills at an angle of about 30°, head to wind, when a heavy downpour occurred. J. D. Aldridge (*in litt.*) reported a few Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* and several hundred Black-headed Gulls *L. ridibundus* at Chew Valley Lake, Avon, on 2nd August 1982, pointing their bills at between 45° and 75° above normal during a heavy thunderstorm with hail. The juvenile Black-headed Gulls present, however, held their

bills in the normal position. Kennedy noted that young birds are more subject to mortality from wetting than old ones, and these young Black-headed Gulls may not have yet learned the appropriate technique, but it is odd that they did not learn by copying the accompanying adults.

On 9th May 1981, at Rye Harbour, East Sussex, Richard C. Knight and Pamela C. Haddon observed gulls and terns reacting to rain in this fashion, also described by R. E. Elliott (*Brit. Birds* 76: 314). Five immature Little Gulls *L. minutus*, several Black-headed Gulls, Common Gulls *L. canus* and Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* raised their bills upwards to 50-60°, into and parallel with falling rain during a very heavy downpour. The most interesting observation was that a Common Tern acted in the same way while in flight. On 2nd August 1983, the same observers saw the same behaviour, also at Rye Harbour, from Common Terns, Little Terns *S. albifrons* and Sandwich Terns *S. sandvicensis*, and this time a Little Tern flew 450 m into a force 2 wind, with its head pointing upwards at 50°, during heavy rain. It is interesting that the rain caused these flying birds to react in this manner, but not to settle on the ground.

Kennedy also discussed sheltering from rain by birds. It is clearly of survival value for a bird with poorly resistant plumage to take shelter from heavy rain if possible. Swifts *Apus apus* move away from, or fly around, local storms and may not emerge from the nest for much of very wet days. Yet Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* may take shelter, but have been observed to continue feeding in the open during torrential downpours. Kennedy also reported seeing Pied Wagtails *Motacilla alba* and a Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* feed in the open in heavy rain, though Blue Tits *Parus caeruleus* and House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* have been seen to take shelter. Mrs Jean D. Garrod (*in litt.*) saw two Swallows *Hirundo rustica* fly headlong into a hole in a dense bramble bush at Minsmere, Suffolk, to escape torrential rain on 16th September 1983. They quickly emerged as the rain ceased. Bernard King (*in litt.*) watched a juvenile Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* at St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, on 6th October 1982. At Porth Hellick lake, it fished from, and regularly perched in, a tall conifer, but at the onset of heavy rain settled on mud at the lake edge, sheltered by a thick stand of reed *Phragmites*, and remained there for 15 minutes until the storm passed. Meanwhile, Coots *Fulica atra* on the lake also sought shelter in the reeds.

Bernard King also watched two Little Grebes *Tachybaptus ruficollis* at Marazion Marsh, Cornwall, on 26th January 1972. Whereas the Little Grebes which I reported at Chasewater, Staffordshire, sought open water during a storm, those watched by King always immediately left open water to seek shelter in reeds when strong winds and heavy rain swept across the lake at intervals during the day.

At Drift Reservoir, Penzance, Cornwall, on 11th January 1986, Bernard King was watching a party of some 60 Teals *Anas crecca* feeding in the shallows of a quiet bay. Rain had been threatening most of the afternoon, and it was cold, with strong gusty winds. The Teals remained close to the water's edge until a violent storm came slanting into the bay. The ducks immediately took flight through the rain and were lost to view. After only 12 minutes, the storm ceased as suddenly as it had arrived, and, just as



suddenly, the Teals flew back once again, to settle into the shallows.

The same observer reports on the behaviour of 3,000 Ruddy Ducks *Oxyura jamaicensis* at Lake Jessup, Florida, USA, on 19th December 1983. Small parties were leaving and others arriving; leaving the approximate total of 3,000 intact until, unexpectedly, a torrential, tropical rainstorm broke. Ruddy Ducks quickly left the area, and an hour later none was to be found.

At the same time, another, very different species, acted quite unlike the ducks. A group of 60 Turkey Vultures *Cathartes aura* were in nearby treetops. As the rain fell, all of them fully extended their wings, rain-bathing until the observers left.

J. Graham, on 12th January 1984, noted a Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens* in the West Indies, during a downpour 'so intense that it flattened crested waves raised by a 16 knot wind'. The frigatebird patrolled 50-150 m offshore, unperturbed by the storm, except when taking temporary evasive action to avoid a lightning strike. At the same time, a Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon* ignored nearby cover as it perched on an open rail for 20 minutes. Precipitation was approximately 70-100 mm per hour.

That different species react in different ways is also illustrated by Geoffrey Beven (*in litt.*), who watched birds at Minsmere on 28th March 1977. It was very cold, with a strong north wind, some sunshine and frequent showers of snow. At times, the snow blew horizontally and there were bouts of hail, reducing visibility to 10 m. Of 21 Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* present, four were visible during the worst of the hail and these crouched in shallow water behind a patch of herbs, head to wind; but, as the weather eased, several Avocets fed in deep water. Black-headed Gulls, one with head turned back and bill under its scapulars, also crouched behind herbs or islets in the worst of the blizzard, but fed when the hail stopped, even though snow was then falling heavily. Shelducks *Tadorna tadorna* and Moorhens *Gallinula chloropus* fed normally, and were active throughout the worst of the weather. I have watched many thousands of Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* on Texel, Netherlands, take shelter from gales and intermittent rain, in very cold conditions, by crowding together along the lee of embankments and inside reedy dykes, while Knots *C. canutus* were bunched together, and Bar-tailed Godwits *Limosa lapponica* and Grey Plovers *Pluvialis squatarola* were widely scattered over open fields in similar very windy, very cold and wet conditions.

David M. Wilkinson (*in litt.*) reports the behaviour of a flock of Bewick's Swans *Cygnus columbianus* and a group of feral, free-flying Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis* at Martin Mere, Lancashire, on 14th January 1984, in a strong, cold wind with frequent showers of sleet and hail. Most of the swans spent the whole time sitting front to the wind, with their heads tucked back into their body feathers, whereas the geese adopted this posture only during the showers, but otherwise grazed during a period of four hours.

Very heavy hail has obvious dangers in that, unlike rain, wetting is less of a problem than physical damage from the solid hailstones. R. M. Lord (*in litt.*) was at Pagham Harbour, West Sussex, on 5th June 1983. There was a

southeasterly wind of force 6-7, at low tide, until suddenly all was still and very quiet. Flocks of waders, including Redshanks *Tringa totanus*, Dunlins *Calidris alpina*, Grey Plovers and Curlews, approached ahead of a storm. The noise of large hailstones hitting the mud was audible at 1½ km. Little, Common and Sandwich Terns, Shelducks, Oystercatchers and Ringed Plovers *Charadrius hiaticula* flew up from the mudflats and the shingle-island breeding colony and flew southwest in front of the advancing hail. The stones measured some 3 cm in diameter, but the storm quickly passed, the wind increased again, and the birds drifted back. No hail was recorded 2½ km away, and the birds had presumably avoided it. Many eggs in the colony had, however, been smashed.

While it is clear that heavy rain and hail will cause many species to take evasive action, take shelter, or adopt postures which seem likely to reduce the effects of wetting on the plumage, it is also obvious that not all species, or individuals, will act in a predictable way. That birds take shelter during thunderstorms, for instance, is vaguely referred to in the literature and assumed to be the case by most birdwatchers, but there is still room for detailed and *systematic* study of the everyday reaction of birds to rain, as well as the more extreme examples, such as those recorded here.

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R. A. Hume, 15 Cedar Gardens, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 1EY

# Mystery photographs

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**115** Last month's mystery photograph (plate 158, repeated here) clearly showed an eagle. Although it perhaps looked like a rather short version of a White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* without the typical wedge-shaped tail of that species (note, however, that wear and moult may cause the tail to look more fan-shaped than normal), its silhouette is in fact typical of the smaller *Aquila* eagles: Spotted *A. clanga*, Lesser Spotted *A. pomarina* and Steppe *A. rapax*. Our mystery eagle shows the following silhouette features: (1) rather long and broad wings, about



$\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$  as broad at the base as at the broadest point; (2) a fan-shaped tail; (3) a rather broad, protruding head; and (4) seven 'fingered' primaries. Golden *A. chrysaetos* and Imperial Eagles *A. heliaca* would have shown a bigger, more protruding head, and Golden in addition a longer, somewhat slimmer tail, and longer wings, normally held more forward. First-year White-tailed Eagle, which may look almost as uniformly coloured as the bird illustrated, would have shown jagged secondaries, typical of the genus *Haliaeetus*. All of the small *Aquila* eagles soar on level wings, with the outer wing held somewhat downcurved; it is usually not possible to distinguish them from each other on silhouette alone. Generally, however, Steppe Eagle is larger than the spotted eagles, and shows longer wings, with a proportionately fuller hand, longer primaries, longer neck and head, and a larger bill; it is  $1\frac{1}{2}$ -2 times the size of a Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, while the two smaller species are  $1\frac{1}{3}$ - $1\frac{1}{2}$  times Buzzard size. Lesser Spotted, especially, may be difficult to pick out among migrating Buzzards. The silhouettes of Spotted and Lesser Spotted Eagles are almost identical. Generally, Spotted shows broader wings, with a more S-curved trailing edge, although wear and moult may affect this impression. Despite earlier statements, both species may show either six or seven fingered primaries.

Plumage characters, however, are conclusive. The mystery eagle shows underparts typical of Spotted Eagle: the combination of very dark (in life blackish-brown) body and underwing-coverts, and paler, slightly contrasting flight feathers is visible especially on the right wing, the palest part of the wing being the innermost primaries. I photographed this individual in January 1979 in India. Typical Lesser Spotted would show slightly paler (warm brown) underparts and underwing-coverts than flight feathers. It should be noted that many individuals of both species lack this contrast, while the underparts may be difficult to see properly on soaring birds, as the somewhat downcurved outer wing tends to shadow underwing patterns at some angles. Older Steppe Eagles, which lack the distinctive white underwing bar of younger individuals, show a dark brown body and dark carpal patch (on some, not unlike that of a Rough-legged Buzzard *B. lagopus*), in slight contrast to the dark greyish-brown underwing. Many Steppe Eagles, however, look all-dark at a distance, but most show a pale throat patch lacking on Spotted and Lesser Spotted. Up to about their sixth calendar-year, Steppe Eagles typically show a white underwing bar on the greater underwing-coverts; this may vary in extent, and on moulting individuals the bar is often broken. Note, however, that many Spotted and Lesser Spotted Eagles may show a similar, though narrower bar, restricted to the tips of the greater underwing-coverts, but sometimes visible at some distance. Immature (dark-tailed) White-tailed Eagle would typically show paler spotting on, especially, breast, axillaries and underwing-coverts.

Not shown in the photograph are the upperparts. Both spotted eagles have a white patch on the uppertail-coverts. On Spotted Eagle the rest of the upperparts are blackish-brown, with one to three white bars on the wing-coverts on juveniles and one (occasionally two) on older immatures; a diffuse whitish patch is present at the base of the innermost primaries. The upperparts of Lesser Spotted are warm brown, with darker tail and flight feathers; on juveniles, one pale, narrow bar is present on the greater coverts,

usually broken through wear or moult on older immatures. At all ages, Lesser Spotted shows a clear, white, contrasting area at the base of the primaries, one of the best distinctions between the two species. Other marks on Lesser Spotted are paler wing-coverts contrasting with mantle and scapulars, and (on juveniles) a golden spot on the neck. (For upperparts of other eagles, see Porter *et al.*, 1981, *Flight Identification of European Raptors*.)

Single perched eagles are difficult to identify. On both Spotted and Lesser Spotted Eagles, the point of the gape reaches back to about level with the middle of the eye, while on Steppe it penetrates beyond the middle of the eye. On Steppe, the pale gape contrasts strongly with the rather dark head. On Spotted, however, the gape may also be rather striking, depending on the darkness of the head. Adult Lesser Spotted has pale eyes; the others all have dark eyes.

Unfortunately, eagles vary a lot, and individuals sometimes show such atypical features that they may be impossible to identify. For example, on Spotted Eagle, the white bands on the upperwing may be so striking as to give an effect of a pale patch, as on Lesser Spotted. Some Spotted, of the '*fulvescens*' variety, may be creamy brown on upper body and wing-coverts, and tricky individuals observed recently in Scandinavia showed more or less greyish-brown coverts and body, in contrast to darker flight feathers (one had a white underwing bar, not so broad as on Steppe Eagle, but visible at long range).

The features mentioned are valid mainly for the younger immatures which are most likely to straggle to Britain and Western Europe. For adults, other characters may be used.

I am grateful to Steen Christensen for his enthusiastic help in many ways during an earlier draft of this text.

KLAUS MALLING OLSEN

167. Mystery photograph 116. Identify the species. Answer next month





# Identification of White- winged Lark



*Iain S. Robertson*

**F**ew European ornithologists have had the opportunity to observe the White-winged Lark *Melanocorypha leucoptera* in the field. As a result, the species is little known, and difficulties have occurred with the identification of vagrants in the West. On a visit to central Kazakhstan in June 1983, I was able to watch about 50 White-winged Larks and to make direct comparisons with Skylarks *Alauda arvensis* and Black Larks *M. yeltoniensis*.

The White-winged Lark is endemic to the USSR, breeding from Dagestan, the lower Volga River area, through central and northern Kazakhstan to about 80°E. It is found mainly in the Kirghiz Steppe, an area of dry, short-grass plains with orache *Atriplex*, wormwood *Artemisia* and feather grass *Stipa* interspersed with bare, open ground (Dementiev & Gladkov 1968). The amount of suitable breeding habitat has no doubt declined since the opening up of these 'Virgin Lands' for agriculture. Since 1954, over 25 million ha—an area roughly the size of Yugoslavia—have been ploughed for cereals in Kazakhstan alone (Larkin & Burambayev 1980).

The species is migratory, wintering in the Ukraine, Crimea, Caucasus, Transcaspia and Iran. In severe winters, it also occurs in Romania. Some winter in the southern part of the breeding range, but these are thought to be migrants from the north rather than residents. In spring, arrival on the breeding grounds takes place between early April and early May. Autumn departure takes place from early August to early September, with strong passage noted in Trans Volga in late August. The species forms large flocks outside the breeding season (Dementiev & Gladkov 1968).

The range of vagrancy includes parts of the USSR as far west as Moscow, Switzerland, Italy, Poland, Belgium, Heligoland and Britain. Only four records involving six birds are now accepted for Britain, several others having been dismissed among the 'Hastings Rarities' (*Brit. Birds* 55: 281-384). These four records were in November 1869 (Sussex), November 1917 (Sussex), August 1933 (Sussex) and August 1955 (Hertfordshire). Subsequent claims have proved to be unacceptable (BOU 1971).

## Summary of identification features

### SIZE AND SHAPE

White-winged Lark is slightly larger than Skylark and smaller than Calandra Lark *M. calandra*. There is some discrepancy between actual measurements and appearance in the field, particularly in flight (Dementiev & Gladkov 1968; Witherby *et al.* 1938). Though wing length is intermediate between those of Skylark and Calandra Lark, White-winged looks noticeably long-winged in flight. Soviet authors have compared it to a shorebird in flight. This long-winged appearance seems to result from the visual effect of the very broad white trailing edge to the wing. From measurements, the tail is proportionately shorter than that of Skylark, but in the field this is not apparent, White-winged looking quite long-tailed, again as a result of the white trailing edge to the wing.

### GENERAL APPEARANCE

First impressions are of a very pale lark, with a 'bare-faced' expression, and a white panel in the closed wing. The closest comparison is to a female Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*, rather than to another lark. In flight, the striking three-tone wing pattern recalls Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*.

## Plumage, bare parts and voice

**CROWN** The crown is pale chestnut on breeding males, finely streaked with dark brown on females, and more heavily streaked on

juveniles. It contrasts with the bare-faced appearance and paler nape.

**FACE PATTERN** The supercilium, lores, chin,

**168.** White-winged Lark *Melanocorypha leucoptera*, USSR, June 1965 (*E. N. Golovanova*)





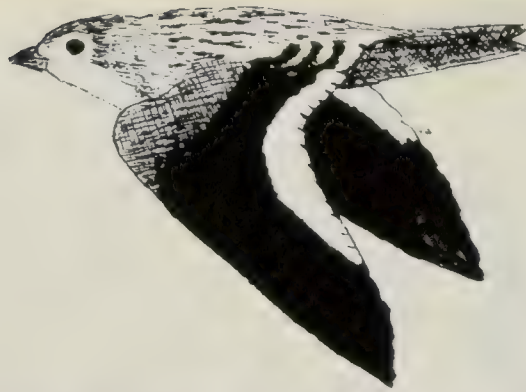


Fig. 1. Flying White-winged Lark *Melanocorypha leucoptera* (Iain S. Robertson). This drawing based on photograph by Iain S. Robertson; heading drawing of standing bird based on photograph by Nigel Redman



**169.** White-winged Lark *Melanocorypha leucoptera*, USSR, June 1983 (Iain S. Robertson)

throat and a crescent below the eye are off-white or very pale buff. The large dark eye contrasts against this pale area giving a beady-eyed look. The ear-coverts are chestnut, with fine, dark brown streaks.

**UPPERPARTS** The nape, mantle and scapulars are pale brownish grey, with darker brown streaks; the rump feathers are fringed pinkish grey, and the streaking is less obvious. The upper tail-coverts are chestnut, each with a fine, dark brown central streak.

**UNDERPARTS** The whole underparts from chin to undertail-coverts are basically white. Some chestnut streaking is present at the side of the breast on adults, forming a diffuse patch. More-prominent chestnut streaking is present on the flanks. Juveniles show fine, dark streaks at the sides of the breast, extending to the flanks, where they become more chestnut. At a distance, the underparts appear unmarked white.

**WING PATTERN** The striking wing pattern is most obvious in flight, when a three-tone pattern (formed by chestnut lesser, median and primary coverts, contrasting with very dark primaries, secondaries, and greater coverts, bordered by a broad white trailing edge formed by the tips of the inner primaries and the mainly white secondaries). The dark tertials have broad, pale edges and tips which can be seen in flight. On the ground, the closed wing shows chestnut lesser and median coverts, dark-brown greater coverts, edged with pale buff, very dark brown primaries edged on the outer webs and tipped with buffish, and dark brown tertials with broad pale fringes. The secondaries form a clear, white panel on the closed wing. Prominence has been given in some guides to the white outer web of the second (outermost long) primary (Hollom 1968). Though the edge of this feather is whitish, it is barely

visible in the field, and certainly not striking. Several other larks, including Skylark, have very pale margins to this outermost primary. TAIL. The tail is very dark brown with broad buffish fringes. The central tail feathers are edged chestnut, and the outer pair show a conspicuous amount of white. The tail appears well forked.

**BARE PARTS** The bill is quite short and stout. The upper mandible is dark greyish horn, the lower mandible has a yellowish base becoming darker towards the tip. The legs are pale brown to dull flesh in colour. The eye is black.

**VOICE** Most of those that I observed were in song, and no distinctive call was noticed.

### Difficulties of identification

The White-winged Lark is a very distinctive and striking bird which should not give any problems of identification. The main danger lies with partially albinistic individuals of other larks. Though rare, they are perhaps not as rare as are genuine White-winged Larks in Europe. Patches of albinistic feathers are sometimes symmetrical, suggesting a natural, rather than an aberrant plumage. The combination of chestnut crown and lesser coverts, together with facial pattern and very dark primaries and central wing area, should be a clear distinction from any other species of lark showing aberrant white secondaries.

Bill shape and colour, together with white lesser and/or median coverts, should rule out Snow Bunting in any plumage.

### Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Mark Beaman and Nigel Redman for their comments and use of their photographs during the preparation of this paper.

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Iain S. Robertson, Easthouse, South Whiteness, Shetland ZE2 9LL

## Product reports

Items included in this feature have been submitted by the manufacturers or their agents. The reviews are the personal opinions of the reviewers; they are not the result of technical tests, but are assessments made after use in the appropriate conditions (e.g. in the field). Neither *British Birds* nor the individual reviewers can accept responsibility for any adverse consequences of opinions stated, and items are accepted for review on this understanding. We aim, however, to be helpful both to our readers and to the manufacturers of goods used by birdwatchers. EDS

### 'Benbo Mk. 1' tripod

The tripod was supplied with a ball-and-socket head; including this, dimensions are: maximum height about 5 ft 8 in. (1.7 m); closed length 2 ft 5 in. (0.7 m); weight 8.8 lb (4 kg). The review tripod had a ball-and-socket



head, but a pan-and-tilt head is also available; price complete, about £118, including VAT.

This superbly engineered tripod is somewhat unconventional in design; an ingenious, if somewhat bulky, clampable joint connects the legs and centre column, so that each of the legs and the column can be moved and clamped into position independently. If the clamping handle is slackened too much, the tripod behaves like a drunken spider, its legs everywhere; loosened partially, adjustment is simplicity itself. The main advantage of this unusual design is that a camera (or telescope) may be supported in almost any position from ground level upwards. I was even able to erect and use the tripod for photography from my car (try doing this with a conventional tripod, especially one with bracing struts!). The extending tubular legs are in two sections; the outer section, which has sealed rubber feet, extends downwards: similar to the *Welt* tripod (*Brit. Birds* 78: 96). It is then locked in the desired position with a chunky screw-in knob, conveniently located at the top of the extending section. As a result, the *Bembo* may be set up in mud or salt water with little fear that dirt or corrosion will affect the tripod.

As a photographer's tripod, it has both the weight and rigidity to support even the heaviest telephoto lens. My only criticism is that the operation of the ball-and-socket head was a little awkward with a very heavy lens, though, once clamped, the resulting photographs lacked nothing in sharpness.

With a telescope, the *Bembo* was equally satisfactory, the adjusting knobs falling easily to hand, enabling it to be quickly set up. Fully extended, it is the right height for easy use, and the ball-and-socket head could be set for easy panning. In a strong breeze, its weight and rigidity came into their own, but it is rather heavy to carry for any distance. Moreover, when folded, the tripod is rather bulky; the adjusting knobs project somewhat, and users may find it advisable to remove them to avoid damage when travelling.

These are minor quibbles, however, and I have no hesitation in strongly recommending this tripod; in spite of its bulk, I had no second thoughts about taking it with me on a recent visit to the USA. Its easy adjustability, coupled with the improved photographs resulting from the use of a solid tripod, made it a valued travelling companion.

R. J. CHANDLER

[If any reader would like further details of this product, please send a SAE to Sandra Barnes, BB Advertising, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK43 3XJ.]

## Seventy-five years ago...

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'FULMARS NESTING IN CAITHNESS. On May 30th, 1911, Mr. B. B. Riviere and I took a boat for the purpose of inspecting the cliffs which form Berriedale Head in Caithness. On some of the steeper faces we found that a small colony of Fulmar Petrels (*Fulmarus glacialis*) had established itself, and as this is probably the most southerly nesting-place of this species in the British Isles, it should be worthy of record. A. H. MEIKLEJOHN.' (*Brit. Birds* 5: 56, July 1911)

# Notes

## Parent Great Crested Grebe killing own small chick

On 30th June 1984, on a fine sunny morning, I was watching a family of Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* at Les Grangettes Nature Reserve on Lake Geneva, Switzerland. Each parent carried two chicks, half hidden on its back. From time to time, both adults stretched and flapped their wings, making the chicks swim around with them. The grebes came near me, but they were apprehensive, even though I was quite alone and half hidden by shrubs. Suddenly, one of the adults seized a chick swimming in front of it and shook it, then threw it into the water and struck it savagely on the head. Was it a 'slowcoach', or had it been 'disobedient'? In any case, it seemed to me to be smaller than its brothers and sisters. It tried desperately to climb on to the old nest, but the adult continued to attack it until it lay motionless on the water, quite dead. During this time, the other adult grebe had stayed apart with the three remaining chicks.

What was the reason for this strange behaviour and extreme punishment? Was the parent frightened by my presence, to the point of making the young pay with its life, or had it simply decided to reduce the number of its offspring? I recall that these grebes are used to seeing a lot of people around and that they build their nests on fallen branches trailing by the water's edge a metre or two from passers-by.

DENIS EBBUTT

Confrère 22, CH-1800 Vevey, Switzerland

Dr K. E. L. Simmons has commented as follows: 'In all my 37 years of Great Crested Grebe watching, still continuing, including detailed observations on numerous broods, I have never seen or heard of anything like this—a parental attack on a small chick. Parental hostility towards older young is, of course, quite normal in this species—to do with brood-division and what I have called the 'in-chick/out-chick' situation (see *Brit. Birds* 67: 424)—but never to the point of killing, so this incident seems quite abnormal.' Eds

**Black-necked Grebes jump-diving** If Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* did not usually jump before diving, this might offer a means of distinguishing them from Slavonian Grebes *P. auritus* at long range. In agreement with D. Graham Bell (*Brit. Birds* 77: 315), I soon discovered, however, that Black-necked Grebes at Staines Reservoirs, Surrey, habitually jump-dive.

P. J. CASSELTON

Department of Botany, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX

**Cormorants roosting on electricity pylons** Previous notes have described Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* perching on electricity pylons and power cables (*Brit. Birds* 69: 498; 73: 310; 74: 181), but none has mentioned this species using pylons for overnight roosting. Since the early 1960s, the number of Cormorants wintering off the Sussex coast has increased markedly, and each year increasing numbers have flown inland in the





evening to roost. Most use trees in the Arun valley, but in the Adur and Ouse valleys, which lack suitable riverside trees, pylons are used as roosts. In Sussex, records of Cormorants perching on inland pylons during the daytime date back to 1949, but roosting on pylons, although suspected in the late 1960s, was not confirmed until 1972, when 23 were reported on a single pylon in the Adur valley in December. This was, however, exceptional: normally, more than one pylon is used and numbers rarely exceed 12 per pylon. In the 1981/82 winter, it was estimated that 220 Cormorants were flying into the three valleys at dusk, and, of these, about 60 were found to be roosting on pylons at six sites.

S. W. M. HUGHES

6 West Way, Slinfold, Horsham, West Sussex

**Wigeon falling prey to grey seal** On 9th January 1985, on the River Conway, Gwynedd, Mr and Mrs T. Davies saw a Wigeon *Anas penelope* disappear quickly beneath the surface, then reappear a few seconds later, before going under again. It then appeared once more, in the jaws of a grey seal *Halichoerus grypus*, which shook it and took it under again; it was not seen again. Although seals are well known to be carnivorous, first-hand accounts of their taking wildfowl appear to be quite rare.

JOHN BARNES

Fach Goch, Waenfawr, Caernarfon, Gwynedd LL55 4YS

**Eider attacked by grey seal** On 17th August 1985, at Pagham Harbour Nature Reserve, West Sussex, I saw a grey seal *Halichoerus grypus* attack one of two Eiders *Somateria mollissima* which had just separated. The Eider was in moult and could not fly. The seal was diving and attempting to come up underneath the duck. Feathers could be seen on the water around the Eider, which, after constant attacks from the seal, I thought to be dead. After the seal swam off, however, I could see that the Eider was still alive.

ROBERT MORGAN

11 Coningsby Road, South Croydon, Surrey

**Grey seal apparently taking Razorbill** On 20th June 1983, on the Calf of Man, Isle of Man, looking down from about 27 m, I watched two Razorbills *Alca torda* on the water circling each other and bill-tapping. After a few minutes, a grey seal *Halichoerus grypus* surfaced some 10 m downtide of the auks and appeared to watch them for one or two minutes; it dived quietly and swam towards the Razorbills, which continued bill-tapping while the seal dived deeper and out of my vision. Within a few seconds, a great commotion took place. One Razorbill was bitten and held, seemingly by the lower belly; amid a lot of wing-beating and splashing, it was drawn under the water. The second auk, which had remained until the grabbed Razorbill was taken below the surface, then quickly flew out to sea. Despite a close watch, I saw neither the seal nor the Razorbill surface; an area immediately below my position, however, was obscured by a cliff overhang. I have spent many hours watching seabirds and seals close together, but this is the first aggressive interaction I have seen between them.

ADRIAN DEL-NEVO

Department of Zoology, University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TN

Corbet & Southern (1977, *The Handbook of British Mammals*, 2nd edn, page 399) noted that grey seals 'occasionally take birds swimming on surface of sea', but the identity of the prey was not specified. EDS

**Razorbill swimming at depth of 140 m** I should like to report what I feel may be a unique experience. I am employed as a professional submersible pilot. On the morning of 11th February 1986, at around 08.15 GMT, while piloting the Perry submersible *PC1805* from *MSV Stadive*, my observer, L. Maguire, and I observed a seabird swimming at a depth of 130 m, and later at 140 m. At the time, we did not recognise the type of bird we were seeing, and thought it was a Guillemot *Uria aalge*, but later, due to the shape of its bill, identified it as a Razorbill *Alca torda*. We watched fascinated at its superb swimming action and the amazing fact that it did not appear to be a quick excursion, but was swimming around maintaining this depth. We were viewing the bird through a 1-m window, and it came, at its nearest, to within 1 m, possibly attracted by the submarine's lights. At the time, underwater conditions were such that we had visibility of 10 m, and the whole area was extremely well lit by our lights. The accuracy of depth was within a few centimetres due to the digiquartz transducer carried on board *PC1805*. Unfortunately, although *PC1805* is fitted with an external video camera, we were unable to obtain a video record due to the position of other equipment obscuring the camera's view. This dive took place at a position of 61°0'61 N 1°40'44 E (ENE of Shetland, about midway between Shetland and Norway); there was a 0.3-knot easterly current or bottom tide.

During 11 years and thousands of hours underwater, this was the first and only time that I have ever seen a bird at this sort of depth. In fact, had I not seen it with my own eyes, I would have had great difficulty in believing it.

J. A. JURY

97 Bayview Road, Northam, Devon EX39 1BJ

In *A Dictionary of Birds* (1985), Professor Robert W. Storer noted that 'Emperor Penguins *Aptenodytes forsteri* can descend to at least 265 m and remain submerged for over 18 min under natural conditions', but we know of no remotely comparable records for any auk.

We are grateful to Dr R. A. F. Cox of the North Sea Bird Club for passing Mr Jury's account to us. EDS

**Pallid Swift occupying House Martin's nest** On 5th May 1984, at Torremolinos, Spain, I watched a House Martin *Delichon urbica* rebuild the left-hand nest in a cluster of three under the roof overhang of an hotel. The right-hand nest was complete, but only a trace of mud remained of the central one. The nests were at a height of about 45 m. At 11.30 GMT, a pair of Pallid Swifts *Apus pallidus* approached the completed nest. On 11 occasions in the next 1½ hours, one of the pair clung to the entrance hole for periods ranging from a few to over 20 seconds; at least four times, the other swift entered the nest being rebuilt, once breaking away a large piece of fresh mud. The swifts moved off for up to 15 minutes at a time during the period. From 16.00 to 18.15 hours on 8th May, the swifts behaved in much the same manner; one twice entered and stayed in the right-hand nest, for eight and five minutes, in which time a martin alighted at the entrance hole, causing much screaming from the swift inside. The left-hand nest, now complete,



was being visited regularly by the martins, which perched at the entrance and twice entered and sang vigorously. I left the area on 11th May, unable to see the outcome.

PAUL KENNEDY

*Golden Hinde Restaurant, Watersmeet Road, Lynmouth, Devon EX35 6EP*

*BWP* vol. 4 makes no mention of Pallid Swifts taking over the nests of House Martins. EDS

**Apparently melanistic Green Woodpecker** At Hoobrook, Kidderminster, Worcestershire, on 25th June 1985, I saw an all-dark Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* feeding on a grass verge. It was wholly black, with no red. When it flew, I noticed a dirty cream rump.

GORDON FORREST

*97 Crabtree Lane, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire*

Whilst this may have been a melanistic Green Woodpecker, the possibility that it was soiled by some contaminant could have been eliminated only by examination (and perhaps chemical analysis) in the hand. EDS

**Ground-feeding behaviour of migrating Swallows** During sultry but brilliantly sunny anticyclonic weather on 12th September 1982, my wife and I were on Trewey Common, Cornwall, a high heather moor of 121 m overlooking Gurnard's Head and the Atlantic Ocean. In the morning, few birds were about except Skylarks *Alauda arvensis*, Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* and Curlews *Numenius arquata*. As the day progressed to late afternoon, a persistent but mild westerly wind came in from the Atlantic, and, as suddenly, a great influx of black dipteran flies arrived into the area (these may have been *Dilophus febrilis*, which are prolific in summer and autumn: E. G. Hancock *in litt.*). These flies were all about us in hovering flight, but equally they covered the ground, the heather and the grasses. We were about to leave when a migrating flock of at least 500 Swallows *Hirundo rustica*, adults and juveniles, suddenly arrived. For three-quarters of an hour, they fed avidly on this food supply: at any one time, hundreds of Swallows had alighted on ground and heather to 'pick off' the flies with snapping bill movements (many also resorted to flight feeding at intervals). Apparently satiated, they departed as quickly as they had arrived, flying over the moor in a southeasterly direction. Although it is well known for hirundines occasionally to feed on the ground or prostrate vegetation (e.g. *Brit. Birds* 44: 65; 45: 69; 50: 306-307; 74: 98, 441), this degree and duration of ground feeding was new to me in Britain.

BERNARD KING

*9 Park Road, Newlyn, Penzance, Cornwall TR18 5DZ*

### **Phylloscopus warbler with songs of Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler**

In 1982, Michael Leonard drew my attention to a strange *Phylloscopus* warbler at Hackenthorpe, South Yorkshire. The bird had been present for at least the previous two breeding seasons, and was obviously defending a small territory comprising rough grassland and scattered hawthorns *Crataegus monogyna* on the slopes of a small valley. When I was first shown the bird, it was singing a song typical of Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* which was so convincing that any unforewarned ornithologist would instantly have identified it as that species. A few seconds later, as I watched

the bird, its song changed to that of a Willow Warbler *P. trochilus*. On this and subsequent occasions, the latter was the more usual type of song, but it frequently sang Chiffchaff song also, sometimes alone for periods of up to 15 minutes or so. Occasionally, it changed from one form of song to the other without any audible break between the two. All who saw the bird, including A. Bailey, G. P. Mawson and S. Toher, considered it to be a Willow Warbler on shape and coloration, but unfortunately all attempts to trap the bird, which was ringed, were unsuccessful. It did not return in 1983.

R. A. FROST

66 St Lawrence Road, North Wingfield, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S42 5LL

### **Appearance and song of possible Chiffchaff × Willow Warbler**

**hybrid** In 1982, in a study area in Lothian, southeast Scotland, a brood of *Phylloscopus* warblers was reared by a male Chiffchaff *P. collybita* and a female Willow Warbler *P. trochilus* (*Brit. Birds* 76: 248-251). We were unable to visit the site in 1983, but on 23rd April 1984 we did so, and were struck by an unusual song, best described as Chiffchaff-type phrases preceding and following typical Willow Warbler song. Further study revealed that the singer was one of the brood of presumed hybrids, which had all been colour-ringed. On 28th April, we returned and caught the bird in a mistnet. It was similar to a male Willow Warbler in size (wing 68 mm; weight 9.7 g). Its 2nd primary equalled the 6th, which is typical of Willow Warbler, but there was a slight trace of emargination on the 6th, though less obvious than on the majority of Chiffchaffs (at the nestling stage, no emargination at all had been visible on the growing feather). Its legs were dark grey-brown, paler at the rear. Its plumage was generally duller than that of any Willow Warblers we have handled, although this was obvious only when other birds were available for direct comparison. We suspect that most ringers would have identified the bird as a Willow Warbler in the hand, dull plumage being not uncommon among northern Willow Warblers (Williamson, 1974, *The Genus Phylloscopus*, BTO Guide No. 2). In the field, the presumed hybrid responded more readily to tape-recordings of Willow Warbler than to those of Chiffchaff. Whether other hybrids would resemble this individual is not known.

Owing to construction work on the study site, opportunities to study warblers were very limited in 1984 and we could not catch another *Phylloscopus* warbler which also had an unusual song. It usually sang like a Chiffchaff, but also produced phrases reminiscent of a Willow Warbler, to such good effect that we thought at first that two birds were in the same bush. The origin of this individual is not known; it was unringed, and clearly not a member of the brood of presumed hybrids from 1982.

We would stress that the production of Chiffchaff song phrases by Willow Warblers, or vice versa (both are recorded in *The Handbook*), is insufficient evidence of hybridisation. Furthermore, the songs of Chiffchaffs in Iberia and North Africa include phrases similar to those of Willow Warbler (Thielcke & Linsenmair, *J. Orn.* 104: 372-402), and an individual apparently of this form (known as '*brehmii*') has been recorded in Dorset (*Brit. Birds* 77: 25). It does seem, however, that there is scope for further study of



these points, ideally by ringers who are prepared to watch their birds closely in the field.

S. R. D. DA PRATO and E. S. DA PRATO

38 Carlaverock Grove, Tranent, East Lothian EH33 2EB

**Chiffchaff with songs of Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler** A Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* with an extraordinary song, starting like a typical Chiffchaff and developing into a trill very similar to that of a typical Willow Warbler *P. trochilus*, was present and heard singing at Ballagh, Co. Tipperary, from 21st April to 23rd July 1985. That it was a male Chiffchaff was established by trapping and ringing at 06.00 GMT on 21st April (wing 62 mm; weight 7.9 g) and retrapping on 3rd and 12th May, when the wing formula was re-checked (emarginated 6th; 2nd primary between 7th and 8th) and bare-part coloration compared with other Chiffchaffs. It behaved as though on breeding territory, but the presence of a female and nest were not established (four adult and 14 juvenile Chiffchaffs were ringed in this study area in 1985). The song was often very predominantly that of Chiffchaff, but reverted to the Chiffchaff-becoming-Willow-Warbler song combination without fail after, at most, six pure Chiffchaff phrases.

CHRISTOPHER WILSON

Dreoilín, Knockavilla, Dundrum, Co. Tipperary, Ireland

A tape-recording of the song was sent to Ron Kettle of the British Library of Wildlife Sounds, who informed us that the BLOWS collection contains recordings of three other examples of mixed Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler song: from Wales, in May 1979; from Gloucestershire, in April 1980; and from Trondheim, Norway, in July 1983. See also the notes above. EDS

**Jay taking peanuts from hanging mesh bag** Two previous notes described Jays *Garrulus glandarius* learning to feed on peanuts in helical spring holders. In the first, peanuts were dislodged by various shaking techniques and later by the holder being tipped (*Brit. Birds* 56: 221). The second described one Jay hanging on the side of the holder, like a tit *Parus*, and another flying up from the ground and stabbing at nuts, without landing on the holder (*Brit. Birds* 69: 105). Observations in November 1983, in my garden in Slinfold, West Sussex, suggest that the current fashion of providing peanuts in plastic mesh bags provides new scope for this opportunist species. At first, the bird's technique was to fly at the bag from a nearby post: the momentum on landing caused the bag to swing violently, but this was not a deterrent; a single jab from its beak was sufficient to make a hole in the underside of the bag, and one or two nuts were taken before the bird retired. On later visits, the Jay holed the top of the bag, and it was able to assume a comfortable feeding position from which it took 39 nuts in as many seconds. This rate of feeding soon reduced the bulk of the nuts and made landing and feeding more difficult and, I thought, self-limiting. The Jay, however, soon overcame this problem by flying at the very bottom of the bag and hanging there, totally inverted, in typical tit fashion. Greenfinches *Carduelis chloris* and Great Tits *Parus major* attempted to feed on the bag while the Jay was present, but with little success. S. W. M. HUGHES

6 West Way, Slinfold, Horsham, West Sussex



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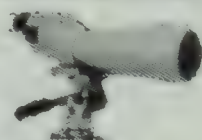
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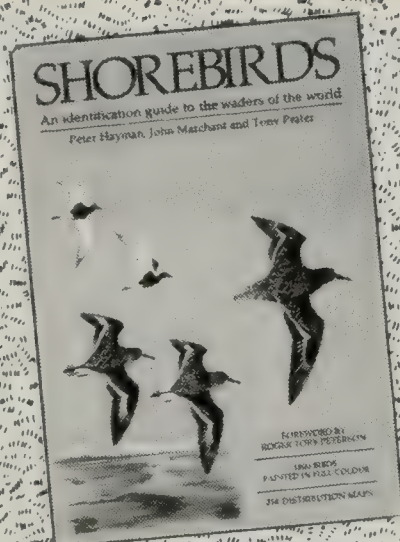
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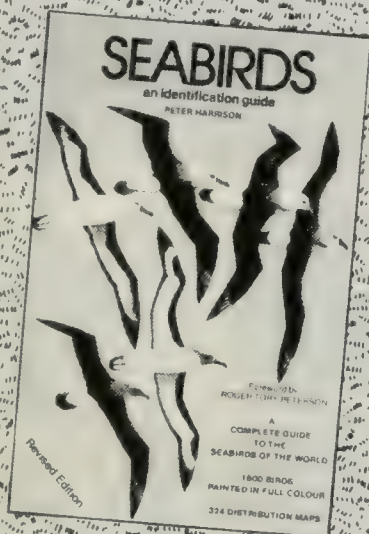




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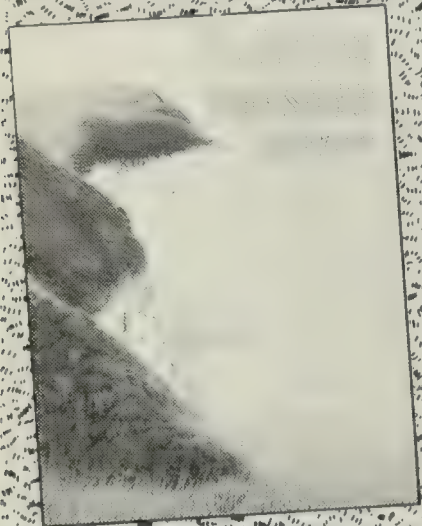


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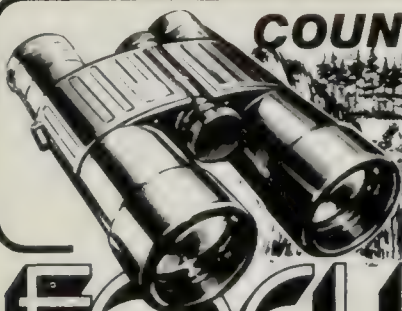
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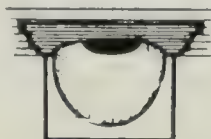
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# Letters

**'Mystery photographs 92': Franklin's Gull or Laughing Gull?** The request to readers for considered opinions about the identity of the mystery gull *Larus* at Radipole, Dorset, on 13th April 1980, depicted in the July 1984 issue (*Brit. Birds* 77: plate 112, reprinted with a second photograph as plates 134 & 135 with P. J. Grant's solution in the subsequent issue, *Brit. Birds*: 350-352) elicited 15 thoughtful replies, ranging in tone from cautious and tentative to adamant and even outraged. Only three correspondents unequivocally endorsed the Rarities Committee's conclusion that the bird was a Laughing Gull *L. atricilla*, though two more thought Laughing Gull at least as possible as Franklin's Gull *L. pipixcan*. Six took rather firm stands (and one spoke more warily) for Franklin's Gull, one for Bonaparte's Gull *L. philadelphia*, and two for Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus*. Two suggested the possibility of a hybrid: Black-headed  $\times$  Laughing, Black-headed  $\times$  Franklin's, or Black-headed  $\times$  Mediterranean Gull *L. melanocephalus*.

In most cases, the arguments against one species or another were put more strongly than the arguments for the proposed alternative solution. In general, correspondents depended heavily on interpretations of the colour of the upperparts, the contour and proportions of the bill, the shape of the hood, and the thickness of the eye-crescents to defend their positions.

*The case for Bonaparte's Gull*, put by Robin Prytherch, was accompanied by a drawing comparing Bonaparte's delicate bill, rounded forehead, and extended chin-feathering with the heavier bill, more sloping forehead, and

**170.** Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* with Herring Gulls *L. argentatus*, Dorset, April 1980 (previously published as plates 112 and 134 in volume 77) (Brian Holmes)





receding chin of both Franklin's and Laughing Gulls. For Mr Prytherch, size, jizz, bill proportions, hood-shape, eye-crescents, colour of the upperparts, leg-length, and white-tipped primaries were all entirely compatible with Bonaparte's.

COMMENT Although I would argue that the eye-crescents are too thick, the bill too heavy and bulbous, and the wing-pattern inappropriate for Bonaparte's Gull, the conclusive arguments against this diagnosis are found in the text, not the photographs. The bird in question had a dark red bill with an orange tip, dark legs (possibly dark red), and upperparts darker grey than those of Common Gull *L. canus*. Bonaparte's Gull's black bill (occasionally red just at the base), orange-red legs, and light grey mantle and scapulars take this species out of the running immediately.

*The case for Black-headed Gull or its hybrids*, presented by Volker Conrad and D. I. M. Wallace, might be summarised as 'Why on earth not?!' Both Black-headed Gull advocates found almost nothing to suggest either Franklin's or Laughing Gull in the photographs. Mr Wallace found the head-pattern, the posture, and the 'tripping gait' just right for Black-headed and thought he saw a white blaze on the outer primaries in plate 134. He suggested that the black hood (if correctly perceived) and the thick eye-crescents might be attributable to a Mediterranean Gull gene.

COMMENT An unfortunate omission from the information available to readers is the evidence from another photograph showing a raised wing with all-dark outer primaries. This feature eliminates consideration of both Black-headed and Bonaparte's Gulls at once, even if no discrepancies in bill-shape, eye-crescents, wing-pattern, and upperparts colour are perceived in the published photographs and text.

Though it may be difficult to overcome the powerful impression of pale upperparts presented by the photographs, which appear overexposed, a fair analysis must take into account the observers' presumably thorough familiarity with Black-headed Gulls and their confidence that the bird was darker than a Common Gull.

171. Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* with Herring Gull *L. argentatus*. Dorset, April 1980 (previously published as plate 135 in volume 77) (Brian Holmes)



*The case for Franklin's Gull* rested largely on presumed differences between Franklin's and Laughing Gulls. It is worth while to eliminate at once the false assumptions that convinced several correspondents that the bird could not be a Laughing Gull:

1. **SIZE** Not all Laughing Gulls are larger than Black-headed Gulls. Laughing Gulls breeding in the Caribbean overlap in wing- and tarsus-measurements with both Franklin's and Black-headed Gulls and are unlikely to appear generally larger than either species, even in direct comparison (and we have no evidence that this gull was ever seen next to a Black-headed Gull). There is no good reason to assume that this bird was hatched in North America rather than in the West Indies.

2. **COLOUR OF MANTLE, SCAPULARS, AND WING-COVERTS** Despite published statements that Franklin's Gulls are paler above than Laughing Gulls, observers accustomed to searching for Franklin's Gulls among flocks of Laughing Gulls find that the two species, even standing side-by-side, cannot be separated on the basis of the colour of the upperparts.

3. **WING-TIPS** It is entirely typical of adult Laughing Gulls to have narrow white tips on their sixth to eighth primaries as late in the year as mid May.

4. **COLOUR OF LEGS AND BILL** From late March to August, an adult Laughing Gull normally has dark red or reddish-black legs and a dark red bill with a red or orange-red tip. Second-summers usually have reddish-black legs and black bills with dark red tips, like winter adults, but these features may vary from plain black to nearly as red as on breeding adults.

5. **HOOD SHAPE** Most of the time, a Laughing Gull's hood (like that of a Franklin's) extends well down the hind neck. When it is courting, however, competing for food, manifesting stress, or hunched down (and probably under other circumstances), the posterior edge of the hood may climb right up to the top of the nape.

Points 3 to 5 were verified many times over in April and May 1985 at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, site of a large Laughing Gull nesting colony on the coast of Virginia.

The remaining arguments put forth by Franklin's Gull supporters can be summarised as follows:

Richard Coomber, backing his point with two good photographs of Florida Laughing Gulls, emphasised the lack of a 'very striking droop-tipped bill with a distinct gony (*sic*).'

A. D. Prowse considered the head and proportions to be all wrong for a Laughing Gull, the apparent attenuation of the rear end a photographic illusion, and the loral distance useless because of distortion. He recognised the anomaly of a Franklin's Gull showing a full hood and dark primaries, and resolved it by concluding that the bird was a Franklin's Gull in 'second summer plumage with arrested or delayed primary moult, the old primaries being at least p7 to p10, retaining worn white tips on p7 and p8.'

Keith Walton, also concerned about the anomaly, suggested that the bird was a first-summer Franklin's with a hood so nearly complete that we cannot see the negligible white feathering in the photographs.

A. H. J. Harrop found the balance of the evidence in favour of Franklin's Gull, allowing for old, much-abraded outer primaries and a more significant variation in Franklin's wing-tip patterns than is sometimes thought. He saw no reason to rule the thinner eye-crescents of plate 135 more accurate reflections of reality than the thicker ones of plate 134. Call, bill-length, and leg-length all seemed to him more characteristic of Franklin's.

Dr Philippe Dubois also minimised the importance of the dark outer primaries and endorsed Franklin's, though he thought that the bill seemed rather long. He was the other proponent of a possible hybrid (either



Franklin's or Laughing  $\times$  Black-headed), citing the pairing of both New World species with Grey-headed Gull *L. cirrocephalus* in Senegal.

K. J. Hall speculated that, given the imperfect understanding of Franklin's Gull moults, it may be possible that some individuals of this species do not have a complete spring moult: 'Among these, surely the most likely individuals not to have a "normal" moult will be those that have undergone the trauma of displacement from their usual migration route' being wrongly programmed internally as to both navigation and plumage.

P. J. Baglee, the most positive of all the Franklin's Gull adherents, wrote twice, ruling out Laughing Gull on the basis of size, length of primaries, head-shape, bill-shape, head-size, hood-shape, eye-crescents, mantle colour, under-exposure of plate 135 (reducing the eye-crescents and eliminating the white primary tips), and stocky jizz.

*The case for Laughing Gull* was developed from a variety of perspectives, but always on the basis of morphology and plumage rather than jizz.

David Ferguson, who had encountered tens of thousands of individuals of both Franklin's and Laughing Gulls, had never seen a Franklin's with a full hood and no white primary spots, and he noted that the eye-crescents on the mystery gull are entirely compatible with Laughing Gulls of his acquaintance. He enclosed a photograph taken in March showing a Laughing Gull nearly identical to the mystery gull in head, neck, bill, and hood shape. Finally, he found the same ratio of bill-plus-head length to tarsus length (2.8:1) in his photograph and in plate 135.

At the other extreme of experience (none with either species) Ken Osborne, initially in the Franklin's Gull camp, analysed the photographs for foreshortening, and concluded that the angle on the forehead was steeper and the bill shorter than it would be in a side-on view. After attempting to compensate for the distortion by drawing the heads in both photographs turned onto the horizontal plane, thus lengthening the bills, he became convinced that Laughing Gull was a possibility (and his drawings are persuasive.)

Alan Lewis made just the same point by showing how the leg placement in plate 134 indicates that the bird is partly turned away from the camera, noting also that the foreshortening reduced the attenuated effect of the rear end and made the bird appear stockier and more Franklin's-like. He also pointed out the fact that leg lengths of Laughing and Black-headed Gulls overlap, whereas Franklin's has noticeably shorter legs. The quotation from the description, 'The legs appeared short, not longer than Black-headed's', seems inappropriate to a Franklin's, but compatible with a Laughing Gull.

Michael Passant considered the key issue to be bill-length and examined all the side-on photographs of both species that he could find for length of bill relative to the distance from the back of the eye to the base of the bill. On eight Laughing Gulls, the ratio varied from 1.19:1 to 1.58:1, averaging 1.4:1; on five Franklin's Gulls, it ranged from 1.027:1 to 1.156:1, averaging 1.086:1. Having access to eight slides of the Radipole gull taken by B. Holmes, he found three with side-on views. The ratios measured 1.472:1, 1.475:1, and 1.25:1, all within only the Laughing Gull limits.

The only correspondent brave enough to reach no decision between Laughing and Franklin's was M. J. Giles, who found the combined evidence of the photographs and the field description inadequate to eliminate either species.

*Conclusions* For American gull-watchers, the evidence presented to *British Birds* readers was less than conclusive. Specifically, no description of the extended wing, either above or below, nor of the uppertail surface was provided.

The seven photographs (in colour) and two descriptions, by R. A. Ford and I. C. Pembroke, from which the Rarities Committee drew its conclusion, are less equivocal; they remove any doubts that the bird was a Laughing Gull, albeit a small one.

The long wings (conspicuously long to all observers), the long bill, and the broken eye-crescents, as seen nearly side-on in plate 135 and more clearly in several unpublished photographs, are characteristic of Laughing Gull, not Franklin's. The gonydeal angle and the drooped, pointed tip of the bill can be seen in the colour prints.

The single picture showing a raised but still folded wing reveals not only all-dark outer primaries, but also apparently all-white central tail feathers. Those observers who saw the bird in flight described the tail as white, not appropriate for a Franklin's Gull of any age (though grey central tail feathers might have been difficult to see under poor conditions).

The upper surface of the extended wings was not seen well, but reminded observers of Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*: dark grey, with black tips. According to Mr Pembroke, 'the under wing had black tips which appeared to fade into a dusky grey inner wing colour although this demarcation was fuzzy and not clear cut.' This description fits only a Laughing Gull.

Although the apparently pale underparts, the hood-shape in plate 135, and the eye-crescents in plate 112/134 (but not 135) are sufficiently atypical of a Laughing Gull to be confusing initially, all of these features can be explained by light conditions and film exposure, camera angle, and the bird's temporary position. (A similarly pale-backed Laughing Gull, with a seemingly droopless bill, a stocky body, and foreshortened wings, was shown in *British Birds* 78, plate 66.)

The orange-tipped red bill and the dark red legs (both features unexpectedly colourful in the original photographs), the complete hood (described as 'jet-black' and 'very black'), the dark primaries with very thin white tips on the seventh and eighth primaries, and the pure white tail typify in all respects adult Laughing Gulls in April. The traces of brown on the abraded wing-coverts suggest the possibility of a second-summer individual, but most second-year Laughing Gulls have wing-coverts that are as grey and fresh as those of adults, season for season. The lack of any other clear sign of immaturity makes it more likely that the bird is a noticeably travel-worn adult instead.

Compared with the case for Laughing Gull, the one for Franklin's becomes very weak indeed. One must not only accept the foreshortened view in plate 112/134 as showing the true proportions of the bird, but one



must argue for an individual in adult summer plumage except for a much delayed primary moult. (*British Birds* readers, not given all the facts available to the Rarities Committee and to me, had no opportunity to take into account the dusky underwing and the white uppertail.)

Why search for an explanation which requires one to hypothesise either hybridisation or anomalous patterns of moult, when one species offers a normal plumage (with compatible bare parts) that fits the bill? The answer seems to lie in an inclination to allow jizz, even of a rare and relatively unfamiliar bird, to outweigh hard data when the information provided is insufficient for an unarguable conclusion. The evidence as a whole points conclusively to Laughing Gull.

I am grateful to my American consultants, Rick Blom, Hal Wierenga and Blair Nikula, for illuminating discussions on this subject, and to Rick Blom for a critical reading of an early draft of this paper.

CLAUDIA WILDS  
3331 N Street N.W., Washington DC 20007, USA

We are most grateful to Claudia Wilds for preparing this summary at our request. EDS

**Aerial display of Black-shouldered Kite** On 7th December 1982, at Beung Boraphet, central Thailand, Tony Baker and I observed two Black-shouldered Kites *Elanus caeruleus* displaying in a manner identical to that described by Norman Arlott (*Brit. Birds* 77: 22-23). Their tumble to the ground from 40 m I likened to a falling sycamore key *Acer pseudoplatanus*. Since the contrasting flashes of black, white and grey during the cartwheel would be visible over a large distance, I wonder if this display is a sexual one, advertising occupancy of a particular area, especially as this species often inhabits a large territory in open, featureless country. PAUL JEPSON

87 Weetwood Lane, Leeds LS16 5NU

**Size-illusion** In reply to D. J. Jeffers (*Brit. Birds* 78: 248-251), I would point out that I defined 'size-illusion' as the particular phenomenon which makes farther objects appear larger than they really are in comparison with nearer objects *whenever binoculars and telescopes are used* (76: 327-334). This rather obvious illusion had apparently not been described previously, but this is perhaps not all that surprising because it is only in birdwatching that size assessments made with optical aids are so frequently crucial, and in which size-illusion could cause problems. So it is misleading for D. J. Jeffers to say that size-illusion 'has been known to man since antiquity', and irrelevant of him to use the Moon illusion (in which, with the *naked eye*, the Moon looks larger when it is at the horizon than when it is at the zenith) as an example: the Moon illusion has nothing to do with size-illusion, in which the illusory effects are created by magnifying optical aids.

He also points out that it is not the image which is illusory, but the brain's interpretation of it which causes size-illusion, a semantic point which I accept, but which does not alter the facts of size-illusion.

Contrary to the main conclusion of his letter, size-illusion certainly does occur when straight line depth cues are absent. This can easily be demonstrated by looking at same-sized objects, one a short distance behind

the other, on featureless ground. The farther object will still look larger, even without the depth cues of straight lines.

I am pleased that there now seems to be general agreement among experienced birdwatchers that accurate size judgment is very difficult, except in the most favourable circumstances, and that a size assessment, when it forms the main factor in the identification of a rarity, is extremely unreliable, as proposed in my first contribution on this subject (73: 227-228). I remain convinced that size-illusion itself can add its own particular problems when making size comparisons in the field and in some photographs taken with telephoto lenses.

P. J. GRANT

14 Heathfield Road, Ashford, Kent TN24 8QD

**Size-illusion** After reading D. J. Jeffers's letter (*Brit. Birds* 78: 248-251) and then re-reading P. J. Grant's original article (*Brit. Birds* 76: 327-334), I am not sure if a satisfactory answer to the problem of size-illusion has emerged. In particular, the importance of movement when we make both absolute and relative size judgments has not been mentioned. Brick walls, parallel lines, test cards, poles in the ground, etc. are, to my mind, missing the point: these are all stationary objects. What the brain uses to compare the size of an observed bird against known birds is the subtle way in which it moves all or part of its body. This is most easily illustrated for birds in flight. If we watched a small warbler (Sylviidae) flying against a clear background, we would note that it was much smaller than a gull *Larus* because of the way its wings move in relation to its body, the speed of flapping, and the general quickness of activity that a warbler displays, as opposed to a gull's more ponderous flight, slowness in turning, and more relaxed way of moving through the air. When we watch a flock of Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* flying overhead, the way in which the birds move indicates straightaway that they are Starlings, the subtlety of movement being very characteristic of that species' size.

Returning to P. J. Grant's original hypothesis, it would appear that viewed and recorded images create the effect that a distant bird is bigger than a nearer one. But is this really the problem that it appears? Do we say to ourselves '5¾ inches' or '14.5 cm' when we see a small brown bird flit through the undergrowth? Do we gasp in amazement as we watch a game of cricket end-on, which shows the distant wicketkeeper 'bigger' than the bowler? No, our brain's programme is so comprehensive as to be able to allow for this extra introduced information. My contention is that, in these situations, we fall back on movement as the prime supplier of visual information as to the object's size.

JOHN HIGGINBOTTOM

Ryebrook, Four Weston Lodge, Portsmouth Road, Thames Ditton, Surrey KT7 0EZ

Whilst we agree that movement—the actions—and other aspects of a bird's jizz can on occasions help an observer to determine its size correctly, they are likely to be of little help in assessing the size of, say, a stint or peep *Calidris* standing or feeding a couple of metres beyond a Dunlin *C. alpina*: the sort of problem originally highlighted by Peter Grant. Birders are now, however, aware of the dangers of size-illusion; it was the lack of appreciation that there could be a problem that was the cause of size misjudgments and, potentially, of misidentifications. The subject has been well aired, so this correspondence is now closed. Eds



**Herring Gulls of 'cachinnans' group nesting on buildings** The nesting of Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* on buildings in Barcelona, Spain, since 1981 is referred to as the first such case for the *cachinnans* race/species (*Brit. Birds* 77: 237). Breeding on buildings by *cachinnans* has in fact long been known in the Black Sea area: in Constanta, Romania, since at least 1953, and earlier than this in Bulgaria (Padadopol, 1980, *Trav. Mus. Hist. Nat. 'Grigore Antipa'* 21: 253-274).

PIERRE YÉSOU

Office National de la Chasse, CERA 'Oiseaux d'eau', 85340 Ile d'Olonne, France

**Pesticides and pollution** In his recent review of John Sheail's book on the pesticide story in the United Kingdom, Stanley Cramp said (I paraphrase) 'the Toxic Chemical and Wildlife Section (TCWLS) at the Monks Wood Experimental Station was disbanded' (*Brit. Birds* 79: 104). True enough, staff have changed, and the section name was dropped (along with all the other former section names at Monks Wood), but this is, perhaps, a little misleading. The work has continued, expanded and diversified so that many more, modern, problems are now being tackled at Monks Wood.

The successors to the TCWLS were recently re-housed in brand new laboratories and have improved means of detecting the presence and effects of toxic chemicals on wildlife.

At present, there are about 20 staff members directly involved with toxic chemical research, and a further ten work on general agricultural impacts on wildlife.

We continue to monitor organochlorine pesticides and PCBs, in seabirds and birds of prey, and actively investigate the causes of wildlife mortality incidents under contract to the Nature Conservancy Council. Also, we have, since 1975, started work on a number of other topics. Work on metal provides some convenient examples, such as lead in swans *Cygnus*, cadmium and mercury in seabirds, and the Mersey estuary bird mortalities.

Additionally, we have work in progress on the impact of 'acid rain', on improving ways of detecting the adverse effects of chemicals on wildlife, and on factors affecting the uptake of chemicals by animals.

As a result of our scientific investigations, national and international agencies seek our advice and information on a very regular basis. For example, we have recently produced a report on the effects of 'acid rain' on frogs *Rana* for the EEC and regularly contribute to the World Health Organisation's series of Environmental Health Criteria Documents and to the UN Environment Programme's International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals.

Your readers might also like to know that, in addition to the work at Monks Wood, this Institute's other research stations, placed as they are at strategic locations around the country, also conduct a great deal of work on pollution—particularly into the problems associated with 'acid rain' (ITE Bush/ITE Brathens) and the waste products from nuclear power (ITE Merlewood). Further, the work on environmental pollution is increasingly integrated with work on land use, the breeding and feeding ecology of indicator organisms, and ecophysiology. An Institute-wide research programme aimed at assessing the impact of agriculture on the environ-

ment has also recently been implemented, along with studies into the management of those parts of agricultural land which undergo periodic inundation.

In short, I feel that the work has been expanded even though TCWLS was disbanded and I hope this letter should go some way to reassuring your readers.

M. D. HOOPER

*Monks Wood Experimental Station, Abbots Ripton, Huntingdon PE17 2LS*

**Mediterranean races of Manx Shearwater in British waters** The possible identification of the east Mediterranean race of Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus yelkouan* (known as 'Levantine') in British waters is receiving another airing (*Brit. Birds* 76: 413), but is the 'Balearic' *P. p. mauretanicus* versus Levantine situation that simple? J. S. Ash and K. B. Rooke (*Brit. Birds* 47: 285-296) demonstrated the variability of Balearic Shearwaters seen at Portland, Dorset, grouping them broadly into light and dark phases. During 1953-57, the possibility that the very light individuals might be of the race *yelkouan* was mooted. Dr I. C. T. Nisbet and T. C. Smout, travelling from east of Venice to the Sea of Marmara, distinguished three discrete types of *yelkouan*, indicating variability in appearance (*Brit. Birds* 50: 201). Do these variations suggest that a cline may exist, birds becoming progressively darker, and perhaps larger, from east to west?

G. H. REES

*16 Winch Crescent, Haverfordwest, Dyfed*

Curtis *et al.* (*Brit. Birds* 78: 123-138) made the surprising claim that the race *yelkouan* of Manx Shearwater occurs in the North Sea off Flamborough Head, North Humberside, from May to December in the ratio of one *yelkouan* to nine *mauretanicus*. Off the Lizard peninsula, Cornwall, I have recorded 232 *mauretanicus*, in every month of the year except February, but only three Manx which I have regarded as of the race *yelkouan*, all of which were in the first half of May. I know of no other observers who have identified *yelkouan* in either Devon or Cornwall, so the ratio may be even lower than my own records indicate. Indeed, outside the short period in which I have seen them, they appear to be absent. The answer to this discrepancy between observations in the Southwest and those in the North Sea seems unlikely to be that *yelkouan* moves north well clear of land before coming inshore again, and it appears that there may be a case for further discussion of the identification criteria employed by the Flamborough seawatchers. There are two points here. The first is that, surely, the plumages of *mauretanicus* and *yelkouan* are quite distinct? Secondly, it would appear that the flight characteristics and size of *yelkouan* are also useful identifying features.

All my three observations of apparent *yelkouan* were made on southeast sites. My position was 10 m above the sea, and conditions were as follows: wind southwest, force 5-6; occasional light to moderate rain; visibility between 1 km and 3 km; light clear and diffuse. One individual passed at



100 m, flying beside a Manx Shearwater of the nominate race *P. p. puffinus*; another at 150 m, with a nominate Manx in the same field of view for part of the time; and the third at only 75 m, but with no other bird for direct comparison. On each occasion, 7×50 binoculars were used. A summary of the birds' appearance is as follows:

**SIZE & FLIGHT** Appeared shorter than, or at most equal to, nominate Manx. Wingspan smaller than, or at most equal to, nominate Manx. Wingbeats at least as fast as nominate Manx, or (in two cases) distinctly faster.

**PLUMAGE** Medium-brown above, paler than typical *mauretanicus*, with clear division between upperparts and underparts. Pale off-white below. No 'crescent-mark' behind

eye, but a horizontal division between upper- and underparts from bill to wing; this division not quite so sharp as on nominate Manx, but nothing like the smudgy effect on *mauretanicus*. Division between upper- and underparts behind wing also roughly horizontal, lacking the pale notch of nominate Manx.

Either the plumage or the flight action (in some cases, both) should clearly identify *yelkouan*. My field notes on the first example state: 'First impression was that it was a Little Shearwater—slightly shorter—much faster wing-beat than adjacent Manx. Immediately realised it was only marginally smaller than the Manx (5-10%) and obviously brown & white. Paler brown than Balearic, horizontal division through eye almost as sharp as Manx, white underparts.'

Contrary to the view of Curtis *et al.* (*Brit. Birds* 78: 124), a far better representation of the appearance of *yelkouan* is, in my opinion, given in the paintings by P. J. Hayman in *BWP* (vol. 1, plate 15): illustration 8b gives an excellent idea of the first two individuals I observed; the third may have been as large as that in illustration 8a, but, even so, its plumage was quite distinct from both *mauretanicus* and nominate Manx. (Incidentally, the table of measurements in *BWP* (vol. 1, p. 150) gives the outer wing length of *yelkouan* as 224-244 mm for 23 individuals, although four adults not included in this table had outer wing lengths of 209-216 mm; clarification of the range of measurements of the three races of Manx would be helpful.)

It appears that the observers of the Flamborough Ornithological Group may have oversimplified the basics of Manx Shearwater identification and are not adequately distinguishing *yelkouan* from the commoner races. I would hold that a typical *yelkouan* seen under good conditions presents no problems. A very small *yelkouan* with its faster and more fluttery flight could be confused with a Little Shearwater *P. assimilis* by the unwary, unless a good view of the plumage is obtained.

PAUL MCCARTNEY

4 Dracaena View, Penwerris, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 2PY

Curtis *et al.* (*Brit. Birds* 78: 123-138) stated that 'there seems to be no reason to doubt that individuals of the race *yelkouan* reach British waters.' If we may reasonably think that this subspecies can reach the British coasts, it would be useful to acquire more evidence than that given by Cade (*Brit. Birds* 76: 413). Every summer since 1982, I have had the opportunity to watch many hundreds of 'Balearic' Shearwaters off the Vendée and Charente-Maritime coasts of west France, where at least 10,000 shearwaters spend the summer (Yésou, 1984, *Gorgebleue* 6: 5-8). In July and August, many are moulting and their plumage is very faded, but some

juveniles in fresh plumage are also seen in the same waters. One of the characteristics of *mauretanicus* is an extreme variation in plumage, from 'Sooty *P. griseus*' type to 'Manx *P. p. puffinus*' type. Some individuals seen at close range fitted very well the description given of *P. p. yelkouan* by Cade or

**172-174.** Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* of west Mediterranean race *mauretanicus*, France, September 1984 (G. Baudoin)





by Harrison (1983, *Seabirds: an identification guide*), and also my personal observations in 1973 and 1979 off the Black Sea, including the division between brown and white on the side of the head. The underwing pattern, too, is quite variable, according to the light, the angle of view and the distance of the bird from the observer. Some Balearic Shearwaters seen off the Vendée coasts during the beginning of the autumn fitted very well with the plumage pattern of *yelkouan* (plates 172-174). It seems to me too early to include this latter race in the British list without a more open debate on its identification and on the probable confusion between the three races of Manx in West Palearctic waters. Examination in the hand of individuals of the race *yelkouan* could produce valuable information on the true status of this race in the Atlantic, as well as in Britain. Without this, any computation about it may only complicate the problem. PHILIPPE J. DUBOIS

*Le Cabestan, 73 avenue Robespierre, 17000 La Rochelle, France*

Certain statements by Curtis *et al.* (*Brit. Birds* 78: 123-138) may incline observers to determine as *P. p. yelkouan* birds which are perhaps nothing other than normal pale forms of *P. p. mauretanicus*. During 1983-85, I studied the latter race in detail at a particular place on the French Atlantic seaboard where thousands gather each year from June to October. Pale forms showing well-contrasted upper- and underparts are not rare, and such individuals fit the description given for possible *yelkouan* by M. Cade (*Brit. Birds* 76: 413). Also, *mauretanicus* not uncommonly shows a whitish crescent on the side of the neck, and darker primaries, and its flight is at times identical to that of nominate Manx. It is also my opinion that better illustrations of *mauretanicus* than those in Harrison (1983, *Seabirds: an identification guide*) are available generally in other published works.

PIERRE YÉSOU

*101 rue du 8 mai, F-85340 Olonne-sur-Mer, France*

A paper on the identification of the Mediterranean races of Manx Shearwater is currently in preparation for *British Birds* by Dr W. R. P. Bourne, Ed Mackrill, Andy Paterson and Pierre Yésou. EDS

## Announcements

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**New books in British BirdShop** In addition to the continuing special offers concerning *The Frontiers of Bird Identification* and volumes I and II of *The Birds of Africa*, we can now also offer the following new books:

Gooders *The New Where to Watch Birds* (André Deutsch)

Hayman & Everett *What's That Bird?* (RSPB)

Please use the form on page ix now.

**The Joint BB-BTO Conference** We wish to draw special attention to the first-ever *British Birds* conference, which will be held at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire, on 10th-12th April 1987.

The conference is being run jointly by the British Trust for Ornithology and *British Birds*, with the aim of providing a chance for BTO members and *BB* subscribers to meet the members of *BB*'s Rarities Committee, Identification Notes Panel, Behaviour Notes Panel, Editorial Board and staff, the BTO staff, and the members of the BOU Records Committee and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. Special invitations are also being sent to all of Britain's County Bird Recorders. The mixed programme will feature items related to the interests of these bodies, with plenty of 'meat', but also some lighter items for participants' entertainment. There will be a 'What's that Bird?' slide competition, a bookshop run by the Natural History Book Service, and a bird art display with paintings and drawings for sale. Most of all, however, there will be plenty of chance to chat over coffee or drinks.

The cost, including conference fee, meals from dinner on Friday to lunch on Sunday, and accommodation, will be £35, including VAT. We suspect that there may be great competition for the 300-or-so places at this conference. A booking form will be included in the November issue of *BB*, but *please note the dates of this conference in your diary*. We hope to see you there!

**Custom-printed, personal 'BB' indexes 1946-85** Orders or enquiries for indexes (see *Brit. Birds* 79: 44-45) should be sent to Dr Malcolm Ogilvie at his new address: Glencairn, Bruichladdich, Isle of Islay, Argyll PA49 7UN.

**'BB' trip to Thailand in 1987** Please write NOW if you are interested in being one of the eight 'BB' subscribers to join Phil Round and Tim Sharrock on an 18-day trip to Thailand in January/February 1987 (see 'Announcement' in May, *Brit. Birds* 79: 260).

## Request

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**Bad photographs** In 'Mystery photographs' we like to include good photographs of difficult species. For our competitions at conferences, however, and for use in our 'Monthly marathon' competition, we need prints of those photographs which photographers might otherwise throw away—the bird that turned its head just as the shutter opened, or that out-of-focus 'just like a misty day' fuzzy picture. Anything which you can spare will be helpful for our use. Please send your 'duds' to Dr J. T. R. Sharrock, *British Birds*, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.



# News and comment

Mike Everett and Robin Prytherch

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'

**Swans and lead** The campaign to phase out the use of lead weights for angling has been gathering increasing momentum. After initial doubts (and in some cases vociferous opposition), fishing clubs and journals are providing strong backing for a change to non-toxic alternatives. The 1986 fishing season will be crucial as it will test the efficacy of a widespread *voluntary* move to outlaw the use of lead. An RSPB poster is available for placing in fishing tackle shops, and is available free via the 'News and comment' address. The Government has already circulated draft regulations on a ban on the import and sale of all lead split-shot (except the smallest, 'dust shot') and all other lead weights up to 2 oz.; it has made it clear that, if the voluntary ban fails, legislation will be introduced from 1st January 1987.

**Portuguese protection** An unexpected piece of protection legislation in Portugal has been the banning of all hunting and shooting along the entire Portuguese coast and around the offshore islands. The protected zone will also extend 1 km inland.

**Lost binoculars** Word has reached us of a pair of *Swift* binoculars found on a lonely road at or near Agadir, Morocco. If they are yours, please let us know—giving proof of ownership, date of loss and details of the binoculars themselves.

**Føroya Fuglafrøðifeleg** The Ornithological Society of the Faroes was founded on 10th May 1984, and membership is at present about 50 (the population of the Faroes is 45,000). Activities have been meetings and excursions, but in the long run other activities will be included.

To improve and update the *Checklist of Faroese Birds* (1984) by D. Bloch & S. Sørensen, and to collect data for conservation and bird protection purposes, visiting ornithologists are requested to submit observations on rare or scarce breeding birds and migrants, on larger concentrations of breeding and migrant birds, and on winter visitors. Details should be sent to Føroya Fuglafrøðifeleg, Ornithological Society of the Faroes, PO Box 2090, DK-3800 Argir, Faroe Islands.

**North Sea Forum** The North Sea Forum, which comprises a number of voluntary and statutory environmental organisations chaired by Lord Cranbrook, has been formed to brief Ministers at an early stage in the run up to the UK Conference on the North Sea. This is being held in November 1987, and briefing by the Forum must be completed by November 1986. Working Groups on Species, Habitats and Human Impacts related to the North Sea have been established. These are currently canvassing professional opinion through the mechanisms of very short questionnaires on issues identified by the Forum as meriting attention. The objective is to assess the 'health' of the North Sea, based on as broad a spectrum of comment as possible. If you would like to contribute to the study, or receive further details, please contact Edwina Miles at CoEnCo, The London Ecology Centre, 80 York Way, London N1 9AG (phone 01-837 5359).

**An aukward one** How are we to comment on a Press Release received recently telling us that a five-man team, sponsored by the whisky firm *Canadian Club*, is about to set off (in May 1986) to rediscover the Great Auk *Alca impennis* at one of its last known stations, Papa Westray in Orkney? A hoax, perhaps, or has there been too much *Canadian Club* going the rounds? We hope the organisers and the sponsors will forgive our scepticism—but such a ploy does seem really weird... however, if they *do* relocate Great Auks, we are quite prepared to tender our apologies. Imagine the red faces in Orkney!

**Alan Harris's ambition fulfilled** Winner of *BB's* Bird Illustrator of the Year in 1982, Alan Harris tells us news of his latest exploits: 'I have freelanced since 1980, and, as expected, it has been very up and down. 1984-85 was very important for me: I worked on the 'Kingfisher' guide for nine months up to April 1985, doing two species a day. I also did my first work for *BWP* (vol. 5), which was a great ambition fulfilled. Some of the proceeds of this work went on a three-week trip to Canada in May 1985. Since then, I have hardly painted a stroke, but have done some illustrations for a forthcoming *Nature of Bedfordshire* for Bernie Nau (an old Rye Meadian) and illustrated the forthcoming

*Birds of the Isle of Man* by Pat Cullen. Looking ahead, I have 16 plates to do for *BWP* (vol. 6), and I shall be spending May and June in St Lucia, censusing reptiles for the WWF.'

*BB* readers can also look forward to seeing Alan Harris's illustrations of West Palearctic wheatears in a paper by Peter Clement due to appear within the next few months.

**RSPB Members' Conference** The favourite venue of York drew some 836 residents and many visitors to the RSPB Members' Weekend in April. Many people even stayed from Thursday to Monday! Despite the numbers, the atmosphere was relaxed and easy-going, with a little more time, perhaps, to browse and take in everything from the art exhibition to the trade stands. Over £2,000 spent on the tombola could indicate the 'spare' time available! Before the programme proper really got underway, two splendid presentations warmed up the early arrivals. John Armitage and Ian Armstrong both entertained and put in some thought-provoking points too. The Friday evening was well-filled by Radio and TV personality and teller of traveller's tales, Johnny Morris. He concentrated more on his experiences with birds and mammals, with the odd python thrown in, than his travels, but even the hard birdwatchers were Morris fans by the end of a very professional performance, tame parrots and all. Saturday began with a typically well-researched talk by Robert Gillmor (whose busy weekend included his usual stint on the painting exhibition and even painting a cartoon relating to a 'BB' item for Tony Soper's *Nature* to be shown that Sunday). Robert spoke on the life and art of Charles Tunnicliffe, presenting much new material from his own collection (gleaned from books, journals, magazines, advertising, and postcards picked up in Oxfam shops) to give an extra dimension to the artist's work even for committed Tunnicliffe fans. Following him, unfortunately rather tight on time, was the gardener of TV and radio, Geoffrey Smith. Not simply a gardener, but a botanist and observer of wildlife and the countryside of great knowledge and perception, he put across a lot of good advice and information in a thoroughly enjoyable and entertaining fashion, rarely equalled by 'straight' bird men. Saturday afternoon, for most people, meant a trip out to see some birds; but for Johnny Morris, the staff organisers and local helpers it was time for 2,500 children and parents to come in for the YOC bird afternoon. The enormous crush

seemed to be a huge success. After dinner, in the difficult spot when plenty of fine food and wine had made the audience a little less attentive than usual, David Cabot presented the results of his researches in Ireland and Greenland into the biology of Barnacle Geese. His slides and film whetted the appetites of all those who would like to visit the spectacular Arctic—and who wouldn't?

For many, the highlight of the weekend came on Sunday morning, with the presentation of only the 23rd RSPB Gold Medal for outstanding services to conservation. The recipient was Sir Peter Scott, and surely there has never been a more deserving candidate. The presence of Sir Peter and Lady Scott added a rather special air to the whole weekend. Perhaps appropriately, though it set a somewhat depressing tone, the presentation was preceded by one of the sharpest and best of talks, on the international work of the RSPB, by Alistair Gammell. He used some very sad, frightening examples of species on the edge of extinction, and the plight of some huge areas of once-wonderful habitat—like the whole of Madagascar—is surely enough to turn the most half-hearted conservationist into a militant activist, if only we knew what action to take.

The whole weekend was a great success, due not only to the RSPB staff involved, but to a complete army of helpers, including no fewer than 70 volunteers from the York members' group marshalled by Heather Reynolds; thanks too to the participating companies, and especially to Crispin Fisher and Collins for their sponsorship. (*Contributed by R. A. Hume*)

**Champagne winners** A *BB* mystery photographs competition was run at the one-day joint BTO/SOC Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference at Aberdeen on 5th April. There were 40 entrants, all five photographs being correctly identified by four people: Simon Aspinall (who won the champagne in a draw), Dawn Bazely, Brian Etheridge and Andy Webb. Thanks are due to Tim Davis, Dr Jeremy Greenwood and Dr Ian Newton who ran the competition on *BB*'s behalf.

The 'BB' mystery photographs competition held by invitation at the BTO's one-day conference at Gamston, Nottinghamshire, on 12th April, attracted only 17 entries from the 170 people present, but three completely correct entries were received, from Roy Frost, Steve Henson and Dr David Parkin, the last-named winning the champagne in a draw by the Chairman, Tim Bowles.



# Recent reports

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*Ian Dawson and Keith Allsopp*

**These are largely unchecked reports,  
not authenticated records**

The dates in this report refer to April unless otherwise stated.

Early in the month, high pressure to the northwest brought cold air in from the north. From 13th, a low-pressure system remained stationary for several days, with very unsettled rainy and cold conditions. High pressure developed to the south on 18th, bringing in warmer air, but by 21st Atlantic air pushed in from the west bringing further wet, cool weather.

## **Birds of prey**

A fine day on 26th was ideal for raptor movement in southern England: **Black Kites** *Milvus migrans* appeared over Dungeness (Kent) and Pagham (West Sussex), and wandering **Red Kites** *M. milvus* were seen at Dry Drayton (Cambridgeshire) and Steeple Bumpstead (Essex). **Marsh Harriers** *Circus aeruginosus* passed through St Catherine's Point (Isle of Wight), Theale (Berkshire) and Grafham Water (Cambridgeshire), while **Hobbies** *Falco subbuteo* arrived in force, with records at St Catherine's Point, Portland (Dorset), Bedford (Bedfordshire), and three together at St Ives (Cambridgeshire). The previous day had seen a **Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* at Holme (Norfolk), and the following produced a **Rough-legged Buzzard** *Buteo lagopus* on Holy Island (Northumberland). A further **Black Kite** was found at Weeley near Clacton-on-Sea (Essex) on 30th, and the same day a **Red Kite** passed south over Sandwich Bay (Kent). Other **Rough-legged Buzzards** occurred at Castor Hanglands (Cambridgeshire) on 1st and Benacre (Suffolk) on 19th where there were also two **Buzzards** *B. buteo*, with another at Potton (Bedfordshire) on 23rd. Good numbers of **Ospreys** *Pandion haliaetus* passed through during the month,





with over 20 reported, from Malahide (Co. Dublin), again on 26th, north as far as Shetland, where there were two on 22nd. Two white **Gyrfalcons** *F. rusticolus* which turned up on 31st March, at Berry Head (Devon) (plate 178) and Wexford Slobs (Co. Wexford) (plates 175 & 176), stayed to 9th and 3rd respectively, while there were also reports of different (?) ones at Over (Cambridgeshire) and Lundy (Devon). On Unst (Shetland) a young **White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* was seen early in the month.

#### Small migrants

The coldest April for over 60 years in southern England and since records began in Northern Ireland was, perhaps not surprisingly, a disappointing month for migrants. Most species had trickled in by the month end, but mainly in small numbers,

and up to ten days later than usual. **Swallows** *Hirundo rustica* did not appear in many localities until the second half of the month, with 155 north at Sandwich on 29th the only movement there. The only exciting movements in evidence were falls of thrushes, chats and finches on the coast of northeast England from 16th to 19th, and in the Northern Isles on 21st and 22nd. On 17th, Redcar (Cleveland) saw ten **Black Redstarts** *Phoenicurus ochruros* and 400 **Robins** *Erithacus rubecula* between there and Hartlepool, and farther north, at Eyemouth (Borders), there were 'loads of Robins' including 200 in one field. On 18th, ten **Ring Ouzels** *Turdus torquatus* were at Redcar, 27 on Holy Island, nine at Tynemouth (Tyne & Wear), and three in the Mourne Mountains (Co. Down), and, also on 18th, 20 **Black Redstarts** and 570 **Robins** on Holy Island. On 21st and 22nd, there were over 5,600 migrants on Fair Isle (Shetland) alone including 900 **Robins**, 40 **Ring Ouzels**, 1,250 **Blackbirds** *T. merula*, 850 **Song Thrushes** *T. philomelos*, 800 **Fieldfares** *T. pilaris* and 500 **Redwings** *T. iliacus*, along with 600 **Bramblings** *Fringilla montifringilla*, 250 **Chaffinches** *F. coelebs* and three **Hawfinches** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*. The rest of Shetland and Orkney each had at least seven of this large finch, while on Orkney the Robin count ran 'well into thousands'. Also associated with this fall on Fair Isle were 50 **Woodcocks** *Scolopax rusticola* and three **Waxwings** *Bombycilla garrulus*. Earlier in the

**175 & 176.** Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus*, Co. Wexford, April 1986 (left, Bob Strickland; below, Anthony McGeehan)





month, there had been one Waxwing at Little Paxton (Cambridgeshire) on 3rd, and another, found dead, at Binscarth (Orkney) on 10th, and there was a good inland passage of **Black Redstarts**, with up to seven at one gravel-pit near Norwich (Norfolk), and three in a single garden at Tadley (Hampshire). **Pied Wagtails** *Motacilla alba* of the nominate race *alba* known as the 'White Wagtail' peaked at 21 on 2nd at Sandwich (a site record), and 22 on 26th at Siddick Pond (Cumbria).

Scarce migrants included single **Woodlarks** *Lullula arborea* at Sandwich on 2nd, 19th and 29th, a **Shore Lark** *Eremophila alpestris* on 21st, and a **Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* also there on 29th, **Wrynecks** *Jynx torquilla* at Church Norton (West Sussex) and Woodbridge (Suffolk) late in the month, a **Blue-throat** *Luscinia svecica* at Portland on 26th, six **Firecrests** *Regulus ignicapillus* at Dungeness on 14th, a scatter of **Great Grey Shrikes** *Lanius excubitor*, four **Serins** *Serinus serinus* late in the month, with two each at Sandwich and Holme (the wintering Redcar individual remained to 14th), and two **Ortolan Buntings** *Emberiza hortulana* at Hartlepool on 13th. **Hoopoes** *Upupa epops* were few and far between, with only eight reported, and not one in Ireland.

The only passerine 'BB rarities' reported were a **Rustic Bunting** *E. rustica* at Holywell (Northumberland) on 19th, a singing **Little Bunting** *E. pusilla* in Scotland, and a **Woodchat Shrike** *L. senator* at Portland on 30th. Remaining from the winter was the Carron Valley (Central) **Two-barred Crossbill** *Loxia leucoptera* and a male **Dartford Warbler** *Sylvia undata* at Dungeness. A **Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata* of the eastern race *stejnegeri* occurred at Langstone Harbour (Hampshire) on 25th March.

### Wading birds

A **Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris* was found dead at Teynham Level (Kent) on 19th, and a **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* at Westonzoyland (Somerset) on 2nd and 3rd may have been the one seen near Yeovil in January. A **White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia* flew over Dundrum (Co. Down) on 24th, and the rarer **Black Stork** *C. nigra* was a surprise sighting from a train near Poulton le Fylde (Lancashire) on 31st March. Two **Cranes** *Grus grus* were seen at Barton Mills (Suffolk) on 23rd March, followed by singletons near Newton Stewart (Dumfries & Galloway) on 1st, and on South Ronaldsay (Orkney) from 23rd to 26th.

A scattering of **Kentish Plovers** *Charadrius alexandrinus* included inland birds at Eversley Gravel-pit (Hampshire) on 11th and Thrapston (Northamptonshire) on 15th, while a single **Dotterel** *C. morinellus* appeared on Silecroft Golf-course (Cumbria) on 26th (with 18 Whimbrels *Numenius phaeopus*), and a trip of six on Blows Downs, Luton (Bedfordshire), for an hour on 30th was the first multiple occurrence in the county. A large movement of **Whimbrels** took place on 20th, with 200 at Dungarvan (Co. Waterford), 90 at Radipole (Dorset) and 60 on Exminster Marshes (Devon). Even more impressive were counts of 535 **Black-tailed Godwits** *Limosa limosa* on the Ouse Washes (Cambridgeshire), the highest-ever count there, on 30th March, and a flock of 200 south at Little Paxton on 13th, presumed refugees from the flooded Ouse or Nene Washes. A small overland movement of **Avocets** *Recurvirostra avosetta* resulted in two at Stewartby (Bedfordshire) on 15th and 18th to 22nd, at Peterborough (Cambridgeshire) on 17th and 18th, and at Spalding (Lincolnshire) on 22nd. A **White-rumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis* seen on one date in March at Sandwich was also seen on one date in April, the 9th, and the Cornish **Least Sandpiper** *C. minutilla* remained at Porthscatho into April.



### Wildfowl

The continuing wintry weather delayed the departure of many wildfowl. There were still 1,200 **White-fronted Geese** *Anser albifrons* on the Wexford Slobs on 27th, along with a **Snow Goose** *A. caerulescens*. Another was with Pink-footed Geese *A. brachyrhynchus* at Loch Leven (Tayside) on 6th: the roost of **Pink-footed Geese** on St Serf's Island, Loch Leven, totalled 7,000 on 10th, and, though most had departed by 12th, there were still 500 on 25th. A drake **Smew** *Mergus albellus* remained at Little Paxton to at least 13th, and there were five **Long-tailed Ducks**



177. Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia*, South Glamorgan, April 1986 (Richard G. Smith)

*Clangula hyemalis* on Staines Reservoir (Surrey), and another on nearby Wraysbury Gravel-pit (Berkshire) on 12th. The same day left one observer feeling 'somewhat incredulous' at finding a female **Eider** *Somateria mollissima* and a **Black-throated Diver** *Gavia arctica* sharing 'an insignificant gravel-pit' at Sunnymeads (Berkshire).

Remaining from March were **American Black Duck** *Anas rubripes* at Tyninghame (Lothian), **American Wigeon** *A. americana* at Blacktoft (Humberside), several **Surf Scoters** *Melanitta perspicillata* in Co. Donegal, Co. Wexford, and in the Firth of Forth (Fife), drake **King Eiders** *S. spectabilis* at Tayport (Fife) and Loch Fleet (Highland), and two **Ring-necked Ducks** *Aythya collaris* at Marazion (Cornwall). There were further individuals of this species at Sutton Bingham Reservoir (Somerset) on 17th and Chew Valley Lake (Avon) on 26th, and **Ferruginous Ducks** *A. nyroca* at Holywell Pond, and in Belfast Harbour (Co. Antrim) on 27th. Few **Garganeys** *Anas querquedula* were reported, with six at the Ouse Washes on 30th March the only count of more than two. **Teals** *A. crecca* of the Nearctic race *carolinensis* known as 'Green-winged Teal' were found at Sandbach (Cheshire) at the end of March, and at Teesmouth (Cleveland) on 19th and 20th.

### Seabirds

The Hermaness (Shetland) **Black-browed Albatross** *Diomedea melanophris* returned to its favoured ledge in February. A **Fulmar** *Fulmarus glacialis* at Grafham on 3rd was

unusual, and a blue-phase individual flew south at Sandwich on 16th. A **White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* was picked up dead on Islay (Strathclyde) in late March, though the Whalsay ferry (Shetland) individual was still around.

A few wintering **Pomarine Skuas** *Stercorarius pomarinus* remained on the east coast of Britain, though an adult seen on the crossing to the Saltee Islands (Co. Wexford) on 26th was probably a migrant. The first **Great Skua** *S. skua* returned to Fair Isle on 28th March.

The **Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* at Newcastle (Tyne & Wear) was still present on 13th, and an adult **Bonaparte's Gull** *L. philadelphia* remained at Wexford to the middle of the month, assuming summer plumage before its departure. A first-winter found at Cardiff (South Glamorgan) early in the month (plate 177) remained to at least 29th and was perhaps the one seen at Kenfig in March. Away from regular haunts, **Ring-billed Gulls** *L. delawarensis* turned up on the east shore of Lough Neagh (Co. Antrim) in mid month, and at Sandwich on 24th, 26th and 29th. A total of 130 **Little Gulls** *L. minutus* was present at Seaforth (Merseyside) on 23rd March, while a single in Shetland for several days was unusual. A **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* stayed at Penrhos, Anglesey (Gwynedd), from 31st March to 4th. Tern movements included 106 **Sandwich Terns** *S. sandvicensis* north off, appropriately, Sandwich on 4th, and 400 **Common Terns** *S. hirundo* past Beachy Head (East Sussex) on 20th. Some 30 **Puffins** *Fratercula arctica* had





178. Gyrfalcon *Falco rusticolus*, Devon, April 1986 (P. Wheeler)

returned to Skomer (Dyfed) by 26th March.

And finally, a bird seldom mentioned in these reports and definitely not a seabird: a **Red Grouse** *Lagopus lagopus* found dead by the roadside near Edwinstowe (Nottinghamshire) on 20th March was only the eighth county record.

#### Latest news

Very few rarities in early June: **Steller's Eider** *Polysticta stelleri* in Shetland, **Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis* on Anglesey (Gwynedd), **Woodchat Shrike** near Lowestoft (Suffolk) and **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* at Clacton (Essex).

## Review

**The New Where to Watch Birds.** By John Gooders. André Deutsch, London, 1986. 224 pages; 72 maps. £7.95.

If I was an American or Continental tourist planning a holiday in Britain, I should certainly include this book among my list of essential equipment for the trip. Some 210 birdwatching

localities are described, usually with a map and instructions on how to reach the best vantage points. Short lists show the most interesting species likely to be seen in winter, spring, summer and autumn. Almost 20 years on from its first edition, this book is still very useful, and worth keeping in the car for use when a business or family trip takes one to an unfamiliar part of Britain. Care has been taken to avoid revealing the locality of sensitive rare breeding species, but a commonsense approach has been taken concerning other 'rarities' such as Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* and Gull Bunting *Emberiza cirrus*, acknowledged to be breeding birds in the Prawle Point/Slapton Ley area, for instance. Care has been taken to avoid directing visiting birdwatchers to sensitive habitats, however, and it was with some relief that I found that some of my favourite quiet birding spots are still absent from this widely referred to reference work. (If that sounds selfish, then I must plead guilty, for I still enjoy my birdwatching in small groups rather than hordes.) Not everywhere in this book, however, is a famous ornithological site. I particularly liked the comment under one locality that 'It may not be brilliant, but it is better than nothing.' You will have to read John Gooders' book to discover the map reference of that particular spot!

J. T. R. SHARROCK

## Monthly marathon

Win a



holiday to North America  
Africa  
or Southeast Asia

**W**e are delighted to announce a new monthly competition which will give the opportunity for *BB* subscribers to win a SUNBIRD holiday of a lifetime.

Each month, *British Birds* will present a new photograph of an unnamed bird (only species listed in *The 'British Birds' List of Birds of the Western Palearctic* (1984) will be included). As with our regular 'Mystery photographs' feature, readers can try to identify the species, but we shall not reveal the answer until *three* months later. Readers will be invited to send their answers by postcard, to arrive at the *BB* Editorial Office before 15th of the following month (this should give overseas readers time to send their answers in, by airmail).

The first person to beat all other contestants by achieving a winning sequence of ten (or more) species in a row correctly identified will win the prize of a SUNBIRD holiday to North America, Africa or Southeast Asia. A SUNBIRD holiday to a destination in each of these three areas will be offered free to the winner, who will be able to choose which one of the three holidays he or she wishes to take as the prize.

After this competition has been going on for a few months, we shall publish in each issue a 'league table', showing how the so-far-successful entrants are doing. But, remember, if the sequence is broken by getting just one wrong answer, the leading contender will be back at square one!



We are delighted that SUNBIRD, the bird-tour holiday firm which has helped us to run *British Birds* trips to Thailand and to Israel, has agreed to sponsor this monthly competition by providing the holiday prize.

Good luck to all our readers! The first photograph appears below.



**179.** 'Monthly marathon' competition. Photograph number 1. Identify this species. If you succeed with ten in a row, you could win a SUNBIRD holiday (see rules below). Send your answer *on a postcard* to British Birds Editorial Office (Monthly marathon, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ), to arrive by 15th August 1986.

#### RULES

1. Only current individual subscribers to *British Birds* are eligible to take part. Only one entry is permitted per person each month.
2. Entries must be sent by post, on a postcard, and be received at the *British Birds* Editorial Office (Monthly marathon, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ) by 15th of succeeding month. Every care will be taken, but, even if negligence is involved, no responsibility can be accepted for non-delivery, non-receipt or accidental loss of entries.
3. All 'BB' subscribers are eligible, *except* members of the Editorial Board and staff of *British Birds*, Directors and members of staff of SUNBIRD/WINGS holidays, and Directors and members of staff of our printers, Newnorth-Burt Ltd. (Members of 'BB' Notes Panels, the Rarities Committee, and other voluntary contributors—including bird-photographers, even if one of their photographs is used in the competition—are eligible unless proscribed above.)
4. To win, a *British Birds* subscriber must correctly identify the species shown in ten consecutive photographs included in this competition. The 'Monthly marathon' will continue until the prize has been won.
5. In the unlikely event of two or more 'BB' subscribers achieving the ten-in-a-row simultaneously, the competition will continue each month until one of them (or someone else!) achieves a longer run of correct entries than any other contestant.
6. In the event of any dispute, including controversy over the identity of any of the birds in the photographs, the decision of the Managing Editor of *British Birds* is final and binding on all parties.
7. No correspondence can be entered into concerning this competition.

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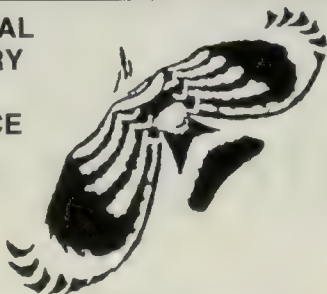
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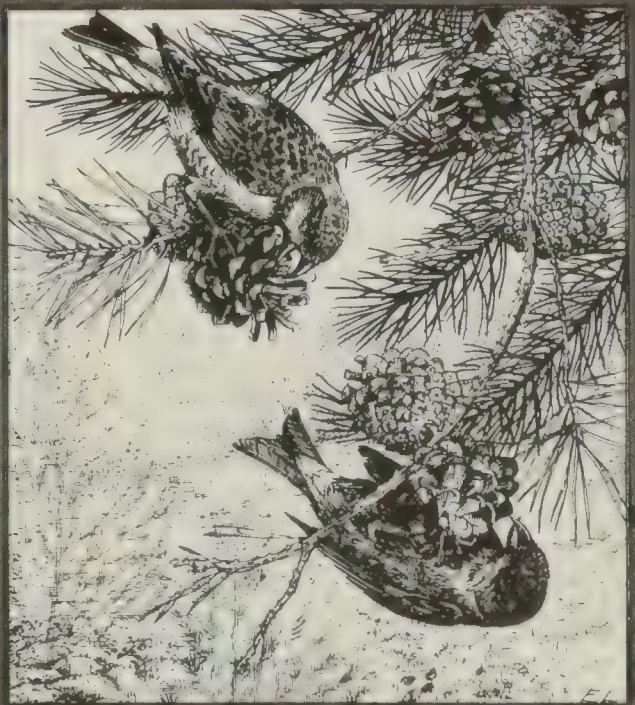
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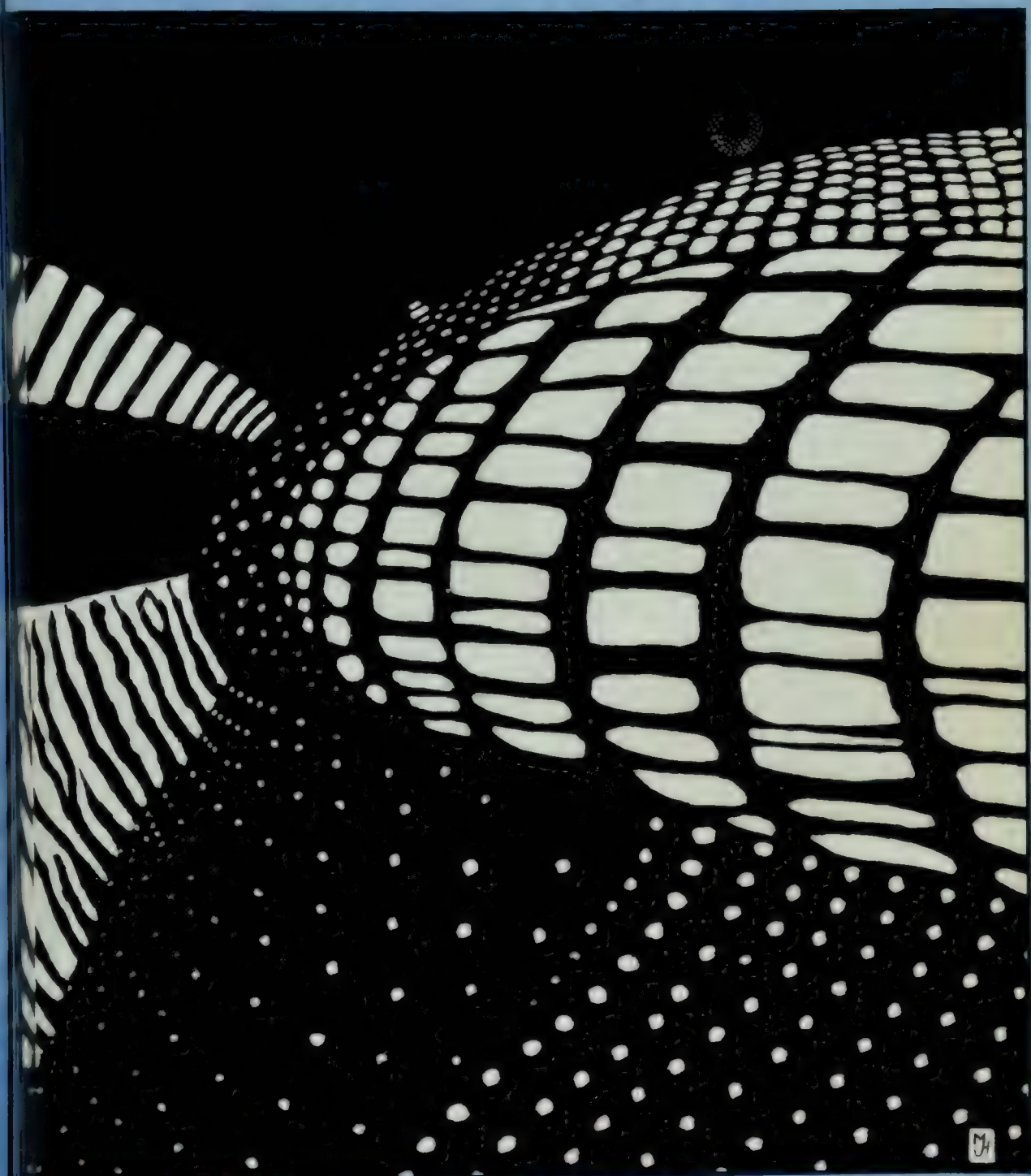
**Front cover:** Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Chris Rose*): the original drawing of this month's cover design, measuring 18.6 × 20.7 cm, is for sale in a postal auction (see page 44 in January issue for procedure)

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Volume 79 Number 8 August 1986



**Identification of divers**

**Mystery photographs • Product reports • Notes  
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**Monthly marathon**



# British Birds

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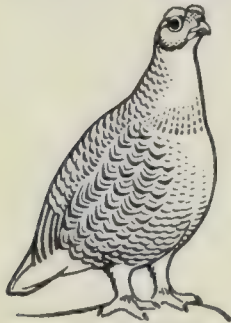
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*Publishing Manager,  
Production & Promotion*  
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*Circulation Manager*  
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*Design*

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## Addresses

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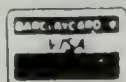
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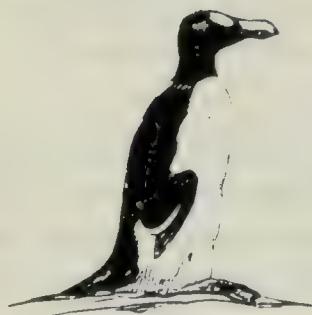
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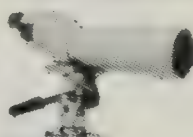
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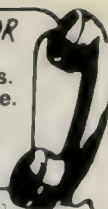
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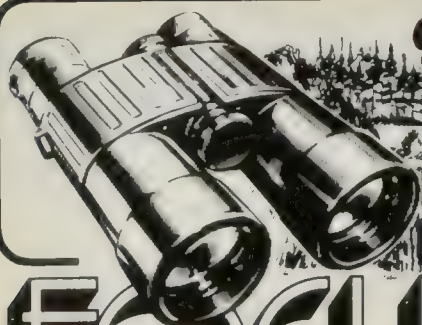
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# British Birds

VOLUME 79 NUMBER 8 AUGUST 1986



## Identification of divers in immature and winter plumages



*R. H. Appleby, S. C. Madge and Killian Mullarney*

**F**ield identification of divers *Gavia* in other than adult-summer plumage has progressed considerably in the past two decades. Much of this progress can be attributed directly to the huge improvement in the standard of optical equipment—particularly telescopes—available to birdwatchers. Various factors relevant to general bird identification, such as state of moult and degree of feather wear, which in the past would usually have been considered only as in-the-hand characters, can now often be judged in the field. This enables observers to determine the age of birds and, where necessary, to apply a highly critical approach to field-identification, essential when dealing with some of the notoriously difficult species. Amongst these, divers have received their fair share of attention in recent years. Major papers concerned with distinguishing White-billed Diver *G. adamsii* from Great Northern Diver *G. immer* were published in 1974 (Binford & Remsen 1974; Burn & Mather 1974), but the two smaller species, Red-throated Diver *G. stellata* and Black-throated Diver *G. arctica*, have not received much attention in the pages of the more widely read international journals. None of the field guides gives adequate treatment to divers in immature and winter plumages.



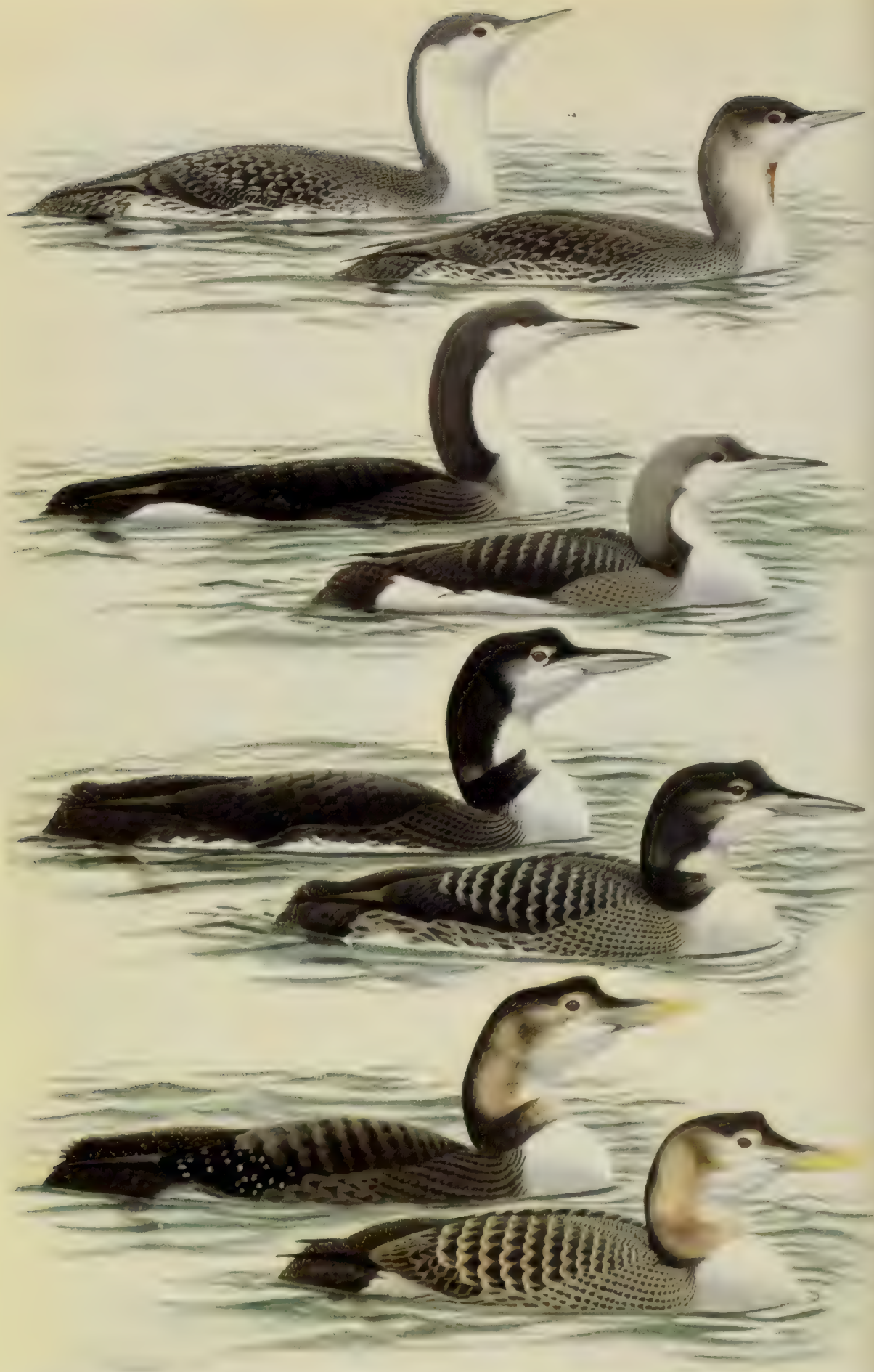


Fig. 1. Divers *Gavia*, adults at left, juveniles at right, from top to bottom: Red-throated *G. stellata*, Black-throated *G. arctica*, Great Northern *G. immer* and White-billed *G. adamsii* (painted by Killian Mullarney)

The aim of this paper is to describe current ideas on the identification of all four species of diver\* and clarify some of the most frequently encountered pitfalls. Each species is dealt with individually, each account including an introduction describing general structure and morphology, 'Ageing' in which the differences between adults and immatures, and moult, are summarised, 'Detailed descriptions' of adult and juvenile plumages and, finally, 'Identification' in which the identification pitfalls of each species are discussed. It should be noted that the detailed descriptions are concerned mainly with features likely to be observed in normal field conditions; more thorough details are readily available in standard works such as *BWP*.

It was originally hoped that a major part of this paper would be devoted to the problem of identifying divers in flight. As preparation for this, a list of tentative ideas was drawn up and circulated for comments to a number of experienced seawatchers and diver-enthusiasts around the world. Many of these people responded very helpfully, but the widely diverging views on some of the most fundamental points were a clear indication of the need for further fieldwork before an acceptable set of guidelines can be achieved. The second part of this paper, dealing with divers in flight, is intended, therefore, as a basic framework for future work. It is hoped that observers who have opportunities to observe large-scale diver movements will test the suggestions made here and, in due course, let us know whether or not they support our ideas on flight identification. A future review of the subject would also benefit greatly from a comprehensive series of photographs of flying divers, and we appeal to anyone who can be of help in this respect.

## Species accounts

### Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

The smallest of the divers (length 53-69 cm; wingspan 106-116 cm), but those at the large end of the range overlap in size with Black-throated Diver. In general, rather finely proportioned, sleek, less muscular and less full-breasted than other divers. Head and neck shape varies considerably with different postures, but generally shows a shallowly sloping forehead and smoothly contoured, less angular head and neck profile than other divers. Head and bill characteristically inclined upwards, the effect being heightened by the shape of the bill. When alert, appears rather thin-necked, but when resting with head hunched between shoulders can appear remarkably stocky and may be confused with Black-throated Diver. In profile, highest point of body tends to be farther back than on other divers (fig. 2).

### Ageing

Adults and juveniles can usually be distinguished up to around midwinter, at least by the juvenile's grey-streaked foreneck and sides of head (pure white on first-winter and adult winter).

By February of their second calendar-year, most have replaced juvenile

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\*This paper does not cover the identification of *Gavia (arctica) pacifica*, which breeds in eastern Siberia and North America and is now considered by some authorities to be a distinct species, named Pacific Diver. Eds





Fig. 2. Red-throated Divers *Gavia stellata*, adults/first-winters (three at left) and juvenile (right) (Killian Mullarney)

plumage with first-winter plumage, which is practically indistinguishable from adult-winter plumage. Usually partial adult plumage is acquired during summer of second calendar-year.

Unlike other species of diver, adult Red-throated Divers undergo a complete moult after breeding and a partial (head and body) moult in spring. (In the other three species, this sequence is reversed.) Near the end of the complete moult, the primaries are shed simultaneously, rendering the birds flightless for a short period.

### Detailed description

**ADULT WINTER** Plumage acquired August to November by complete moult.

Distinguished from all Black-throated and Great Northern Divers by *more extensive white on neck, head and in front of eye*, this alone often enabling positive identification at very long range. Foreneck and sides of head pure white, unlike juvenile. Division between light and dark on head and neck cleanly defined, without sharp indentations of light into dark; often shows more or less prominent small notch of dark into white approximately two-thirds way between eye and rear of head. *White extends prominently onto lores*, often effectively isolating dark eye and contributing to very distinctive facial pattern. White extends so far back on sides of upper neck that *white*

*clearly visible either side of dark stripe down hindneck when viewed from behind* (fig. 2). *Dark grey upperparts profusely speckled with white* due to pair of small white marks near tip of each feather; wing-coverts same. Underparts white, flanks with irregular dark centres combining to form uneven flank-band with much white admixed. Bill comparatively slender; culmen almost straight or even slightly concave, combining with smoothly recurved lower edge, so that *bill has characteristic retroussé shape*; usually pale greyish horn colour, with darker culmen.

**JUVENILE** Plumage sometimes fully retained up to February or March of second calendar-year, but majority commence moult to first-winter around December.

**180.** Juvenile Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*, Netherlands, February 1980 (M. R. Weston)





**181.** Juvenile Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata* moulting to first-winter, Netherlands, February 1979 (P. Munsterman)

White on sides of head and neck much reduced by extensive dusky grey streaking merging into darker rear of head and neck. Intensity and distribution of streaking variable, but on darkest birds only chin, throat, area surrounding base of bill, and narrow eye-ring devoid of streaking. Loes and forehead may appear dark grey, even blackish, showing much less white than adult. Upper foreneck often marked with narrow dull rust-coloured patch which,

along with dusky streaking on sides of head and neck, gradually disappears with progress of moult to first-winter plumage. Upperparts browner, with finer, duller and therefore less-obvious pale speckling than on adult winter. Bill similar to adult's, but slightly darker and bluer grey, with dusky-tipped lower mandible and pale-tipped upper mandible. Juveniles and first-winters which have not completed bill-growth can appear to have deeper, less finely tipped bills than adults.

### Identification

Adult winter Red-throated Diver is usually easily identified by the greater extent of white on the neck and head than on Black-throated; distant adults

**182.** Adult Red-throated Divers *Gavia stellata*, Netherlands, April 1976 (Jan Mulder)





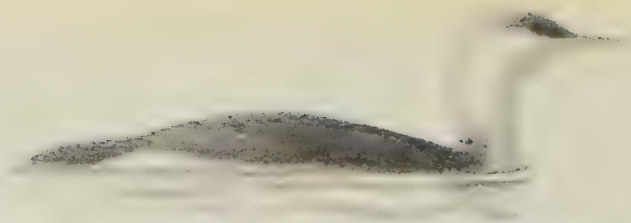


Fig. 3. Adult/first-winter Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*: when sun is at low angle, illuminating rear of bird, rear neck may appear markedly paler than forehead and upperparts (Killian Mullarney)

might even be mistaken for winter-plumaged Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus*. At medium to close range, the white-speckled upperparts are diagnostic. Adults in transitional plumage and darker juveniles might more easily be mistaken for Black-throated Divers, especially at long range, when plumage and structural details are difficult to determine, or in certain light conditions which may exaggerate plumage contrast (e.g. when the sun is at a low angle illuminating the rear of the bird, the rear neck may appear markedly paler than the forehead and upperparts, see fig. 3). Red-throated Divers may occasionally adopt an attitude in which the head and bill appear to be carried perfectly level (see plates 180 & 182). Conversely, Black-throated Divers frequently adopt poses in which the head and bill are clearly pointing above the horizontal (plates 187 & 189). It follows, therefore, that not too much importance should be attached to bill inclination alone. The flanks of Red-throated Divers are comparatively sparsely marked with dark, so they usually show a lot of white above the waterline. When they are sitting low in the water, however, the visible extent of white is reduced, sometimes to an isolated patch on the rear flanks, in exactly the same position as often shown by Black-throated Divers (figs. 2 & 3). Usually, but not invariably, such a patch appears less clearly defined than on Black-throated Diver.

Red-throated Divers are probably the most gregarious of the divers and often gather in large, loose assemblies or small close knots in favoured wintering areas. Their diving action is typically quick and smooth, with a slight jump before submerging.

**183.** Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*, probably adult, Kent, March 1979 (R. K. Coles)





184. Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*, probably adult, Netherlands, February 1977 (R. van Rossum)

### **Black-throated Diver** *Gavia arctica*

Slightly larger than Red-throated (length 58-73 cm; wingspan 110-130 cm). The perfect proportions, smooth curves and sharply contrasted patterns of adult Black-throated Diver in summer plumage combine to give it a stunningly elegant appearance. To a lesser extent, the same can be said of those in juvenile and winter plumages. Black-throated is in many respects intermediate between Red-throated and Great Northern Diver and, depending on the circumstances, confusion is equally likely with either species. Structurally, Black-throated resembles a lean Great Northern, but plumage contrast is more closely matched by some Red-throated Divers. Head-shape can be altered from being smoothly rounded to being rather flat-crowned with a more or less steeply inclined forehead reminiscent of the angular head-shape characteristic of Great Northern Diver. Viewed from behind, the nape often looks curiously wide, as if laterally flattened, giving an impression vaguely recalling a cobra (Elepididae) (fig. 4). Tends to look fuller-breasted than Red-throated Diver, emphasising the curve of the neck back over the shoulders. In profile, the highest point of the body tends to be farther forward than on Red-throated Diver. Bill size and shape very variable: typically long, slim and dagger-shaped, but on some individuals comparatively short and deep-based (see plate 186). Head and bill often carried pointing slightly above horizontal, but, particularly at long range, the bill often appears to be subtly decurved. Plumage generally clean-cut and contrasting, with clearly defined areas of light and dark, especially on winter adults.



Fig. 4. Adult Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*: viewed from behind, nape looks curiously wide (Killian Mullarney)





**185.** Adult Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*, Gloucestershire, February 1979 (C. Prentice)

### *Ageing*

Adults and juveniles can easily be distinguished up to February-March, at least by the juvenile's regular scaly pattern of pale feather fringes on the upperparts (uniform blackish on adult winter). Moults much as for Great Northern.

### *Detailed descriptions*

**ADULT WINTER** Plumage acquired September to December by partial moult in which head and body plumage, tail and some wing-coverts are renewed.

Forehead and crown (down to lower edge of eye), nape, hindneck and sides of neck smooth dark brown, or almost velvety greyish-brown, shading to blackish-brown on lores. Remainder of head, foreneck, breast and underparts white. *Eye-ring, if present, usually very thin and indistinct*, rarely as obvious as on any adult winter Great Northern Diver. Apart from slight merging at rear of ear-coverts, white and dark on head and neck are

sharply demarcated; in profile, *divide between black and white runs approximately midway down side of neck*. Contrast emphasised by *indistinct blackish-brown stripe on side of neck*, which usually ends as short projection into white of lower ear-coverts. Basal part of hindneck (which is largely concealed by shoulders when neck is relaxed) is darker shade of brown than upper hindneck. In good light conditions, velvety grey sheen to hindneck is emphasised by *very dark, practically uniform blackish upperparts*. At close range, it may be possible to discern fine white spotting on otherwise blackish lesser coverts, a feature of

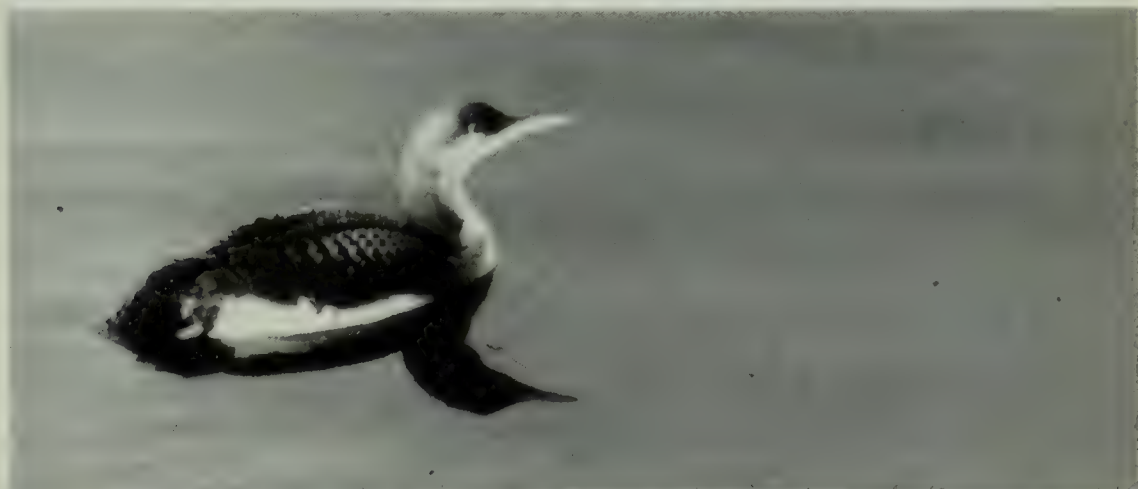
**186.** Adult Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*, Essex, winter 1979/80 (Tony Gray)



adults only. Scapulars, though essentially greyish-black, have indistinct subtly lighter sub-terminal spots. Occasionally, a few summer-type scapulars are present on otherwise fully winter-plumaged birds. Underparts white, with *cleanly defined, even blackish band along fore-flanks* from sides of breast. When at rest on water, rear flank feathers often fluffed up over wings, giving *clean-cut panel of white along waterline*; when actively swimming, tends to sit lower in water, with flanks tucked under wing, reducing amount of visible white to conspicuous patch just in

front of leg. Bill typically rather long and dagger-shaped, with moderately deep base, and distal part of culmen gently decurved. On some, bill is shorter and not so slim (see plate 186). Bill usually light slate-grey, with dark culmen and tip, and variable amount of dark along cutting edges.

**JUVENILE** Plumage retained throughout autumn and early winter; gradually moults head and body feathers from around January, eventually assuming adult-winter-like plumage in summer of second calendar-year but lacking spotted wing-coverts.



**187.** Juvenile Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*, Switzerland, January 1971 (Martin Schwarz)

Similar to adult winter, but upperparts lighter, contrasting less with white underparts than on adult. Forehead, crown and hindneck ashy grey-brown, often a shade lighter and less uniform than on adults. Lores and forehead often appear darker. Upperparts blackish-brown, mantle and scapular feathers rounded and tipped pale grey giving

*regular, neat, rather fine scaly pattern, most pronounced on scapulars*, but not so broad and obvious as on juvenile Great Northern Diver. Wing-coverts blackish-brown, with indistinct lighter edges to some, but lacking white spots of adult. Bill similar to that of adult, but usually paler.

**188.** Adult Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*, Kent, January 1978 (R. K. Coles)





*Identification*

Black-throated is essentially intermediate between Great Northern and Red-throated Divers and consequently is very often the subject of misidentifications. Usually, it is long-range observations of Great Northern and Red-throated Divers that cause problems. With good views at close range, the distinctive character of each species is more obvious and identification errors are less likely.

Black-throated is generally seen as the most elegant member of the genus, and often seems to possess a distinctly 'dignified' character. In practice, the species most frequently mistaken for Black-throated Diver is Red-throated, especially distant birds showing stronger than average plumage-contrast (fig. 3). In these circumstances, the most useful identification clues can be derived from careful judgment of structure and the extent of white on the head and neck. In build, Black-throated is rather heavier than Red-throated, and somewhat reminiscent of Great Northern. The dark tone of the rear head and neck extends farther forward around the sides than on adult Red-throated.

Great Northern Divers are usually obviously larger and more heavily built than Black-throated when the two species are alongside. Size and build may be difficult to assess when comparison with another species is not possible, in which case there are several plumage differences which provide a reliable means of identification. On Great Northern, the upper rear ear-coverts are duskier than on Black-throated and the divide between light and dark on the side of the neck is irregular, with a pronounced indentation of white half-way up the neck. Most Great Northerns, especially adults, show a prominent pale eye-ring, rarely obvious on Black-throated.

Black-throated Divers are generally less sociable than Red-throated Divers, but in spring and autumn they often gather in scattered parties at favourite wintering and passage sites. Diving action is smooth and fast, characteristically preceded by a sharp backward jerk of the stiff head and neck (with a simultaneous slight parting of the mandibles) before submerging.

**189.** Adult Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*, Kent, March 1978 (R. K. Coles)





**190.** Juvenile Black-throated Divers *Gavia arctica*, Netherlands, December 1984 (Arnoud B. van den Berg)

### **Great Northern Diver** *Gavia immer*

The largest and bulkiest of the three common divers (length 69-91 cm; wingspan 127-147 cm), and averaging only slightly smaller than White-billed Diver. At the small end of the size-range, there is some overlap with Black-throated Diver, and particular care may be required to distinguish small juvenile Great Northern Divers from juvenile Black-throated Divers.

The thick-set build compared with the two smaller species is usually obvious, especially the *heavier head and bill, thick neck* and full breast. When alarmed, as for example when being harassed by overhead gulls *Larus*, or approached too closely by a boat, may tighten plumage and fully extend neck to assume a remarkably sleek appearance. Typically shows rather angular head-profile, with flattish crown and steep sloping forehead. Forehead feathers may be raised or depressed to give the appearance of a more or less prominent 'bump'. Heavy build and rather slow, lumbering movements often apparent, even in distant views.

#### *Ageing*

With good views, juveniles can readily be recognised up to January or

**191.** Juvenile Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*, Cornwall, December 1977 (J. B. & S. Bottomley)





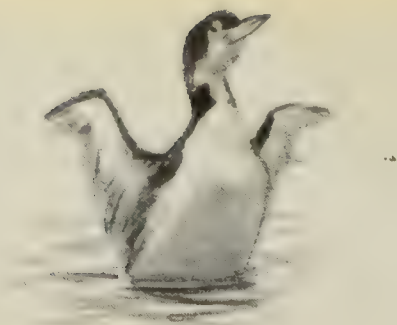


Fig. 5. Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*: adult having simultaneously shed all primaries during pre-breeding moult (February-April) (Killian Mullarney)

February of their second calendar-year at least by very scaly pattern on upperparts (rather plain on adult winter). The effects of wear and fading on pale-fringed juvenile feathers and the commencement of a protracted partial (head and body) moult from around February gradually reduce the obviousness of juvenile characters, so that, by April, second calendar-year birds are more likely to be mistaken for adults. One of the most practical means of ageing between February and April is to determine whether or not active primary moult is under way (see fig. 5). Adults shed their primaries simultaneously (which renders them temporarily flightless) during this period, whereas second-calendar-year birds do not start the moult until the summer.

Up to around February, there is marked contrast between very dark nape/hindneck and generally lighter-looking upperparts. As spring advances, effect of wear on pale feather edges, combined with gradual replacement of juvenile scapulars with less contrastingly marked feathers, results in upperparts taking on a more uniform dark appearance. Some individuals develop extensive pale areas on the nape and hindneck which effectively reduce or even reverse the contrast between hindneck and upperparts. Second-calendar-year individuals continue to moult throughout the year. The extent and rate of progress of this moult is still poorly

**192.** Juvenile Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*, Kent, winter 1978/79 (R. K. Coles)





**193.** Juvenile Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer* in moult, Cornwall, February 1975 (J. B. & S. Bottomley)

understood, but the plumage of birds in their second calendar-year is, in general terms, similar to that of adult winter. Second-winter plumage closely resembles that of adult winter, but lacks the white-spotted wing-coverts.

#### *Detailed descriptions*

**ADULT WINTER** Plumage acquired October to January by partial moult in which head and body plumage, tail and some wing-coverts are renewed.

In fresh plumage, Great Northern is the darkest of all the divers. Nape, hindneck, upperparts and wings practically uniform, dark blackish-brown. By late winter, effects of wear and bleaching may result in appearance of irregular lighter patches,

especially about rear head and neck. Forehead and crown down to mid eye-level, nape, hindneck, and sides of neck sooty blackish-brown. Rear ear-coverts mainly dusky brownish-grey, so white on sides of head usually noticeably less extensive than on Black-throated Diver. Adults show diffuse but *conspicuous pale eye-ring*, broken narrowly in front of and behind eye. Basal half of hindneck a shade darker than upper hindneck, forming dark half-collar, upper and

**194.** Juvenile Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*, Netherlands, February 1984 (Arnoud B. van den Berg)







Fig. 6. Adult Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer* (left) and adult Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica* (right) (Killian Mullarney)

lower extremities of which extend well forward on sides of neck. *Divide between white foreneck and dark hindneck irregular*, but always with a more or less obvious crescentic indentation of white half-way up sides of neck, just above dark half-collar. Entire upperparts dark blackish-grey, usually a shade lighter than hindneck, but by late winter many individuals have faded plumage and contrast between hindneck and upperparts much reduced. At close range, it may be possible to discern very indistinct slightly lighter blocks on scapulars, but, in less favourable circumstances, entire upperparts appear uniform. Occasionally, a few scattered adult-summer scapulars present in winter. Variable extent of white-spotted adult-summer wing-coverts retained all winter, and, when visible, provide positive means of ageing adult; they are, however, often entirely concealed by overlying scapulars and flank feathers. Breast-sides diffusely but regularly striped

dark brown and light grey-brown. *Divide between white underbody and blackish-brown upper flanks irregular*, with much white admixed. Extent and prominence of white flanks above waterline depends on how bird is sitting in water and arrangement of feathers. Whatever the extent of visible white, it is seldom anything like so clear-cut as on Black-throated. *Bill noticeably heavy, with proportionately deep base*. Shape of bill varies; usually culmen gently decurved and gonys angle not very pronounced, but, on some individuals, culmen very straight and gonys angle pronounced, to give bill shape similar to that of typical White-billed. Colour of bill in winter usually pale greyish or bluish-white, with blackish culmen, tip and distal cutting edges. During spring and autumn moults, respectively, bill changes to and from being entirely blackish, and may be variably patterned while in predominantly winter plumage.

**195.** Adult Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*, Mid Glamorgan, January 1981 (Howard Nicholls)



**JUVENILE** In fresh plumage, dark parts of head and neck blackish-brown, similar in extent to adult, but dusky wash on sides of head more extensive. Eye-ring often washed brown and less conspicuous than on adult. White on foreneck and head often dull, tinged with brown, reducing contrast with hindneck, but emphasising whiteness of breast. Upperparts dark brown, with pale greyish white tips to rounded mantle and scapular feathers forming beautifully regular

pattern of transverse, scalloped bars. Wing-coverts, back and rump dark brown, with less-pronounced pale tips. Sides of breast finely striped dark brown and pale greyish-white. Upper rows of flank feathers dark brown with diffuse paler edges, giving effect of mottled flank band; thus, *dark upperparts not so sharply contrasting with white underparts as on Black-throated*. Bill similar to that of winter adult, but, on average, less heavy looking.

### Identification

Great Northern Diver is unlikely to be confused with Red-throated Diver, but it shares many similarities with the other two species. Separation from White-billed Diver is discussed under that species.

The bulk and large size of Great Northern Diver are often obvious characters, even when there are no other species alongside for comparison. Juveniles, however, may be much less heavy looking than adults, and are thus more likely to be mistaken for Black-throated. Juveniles of both species have light-tipped upperparts feathers which align to form a series of regular, transverse bars. The barring is more extensive and conspicuous on Great Northern, and this accounts for the upperparts appearing comparatively lighter than on Black-throated.

The most reliable and practical differences between Great Northern and Black-throated (in all plumages except adult summer) relate to the extent of light and dark on the head and neck. On Great Northern, the divide between light and dark is always irregular, with at least one marked indentation of light into dark about half-way up the side of the neck. Apart from a slight merging of tones around the rear ear-coverts, the divide between light and dark on Black-throated is always clean-cut and uninterrupted. Note, however, that these differences are best judged when the neck is extended. With the neck relaxed, a section of the lower neck is contracted, hidden between the shoulders. This exaggerates the 'shift' in the light/dark divide-line where the neck meets the breast and may give Black-throated the appearance of having a marked indentation of white towards the lower neck (see fig. 6). With good views, there should seldom be great difficulty in distinguishing Great Northern and Black-throated Divers. It should be remembered, however, that some juvenile Great Northerns are not large, some show little or no trace of a pale eye-ring, and occasionally they may show a white patch on the rear flanks. The identification of difficult birds will almost always be resolved by careful observation of the extent of light and dark on the head and neck, bill size and shape, and upperparts markings.

Great Northern Divers are generally less sociable than Red-throated Divers, even in areas where they are relatively abundant winter visitors. In spring and autumn, they are more inclined to gather in small, loose flocks. Diving action is smooth and powerful, characteristically lunging forward and 'sliding' below the surface.





196. Juvenile Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*, Suffolk, December 1977 (J. D. Bakewell)

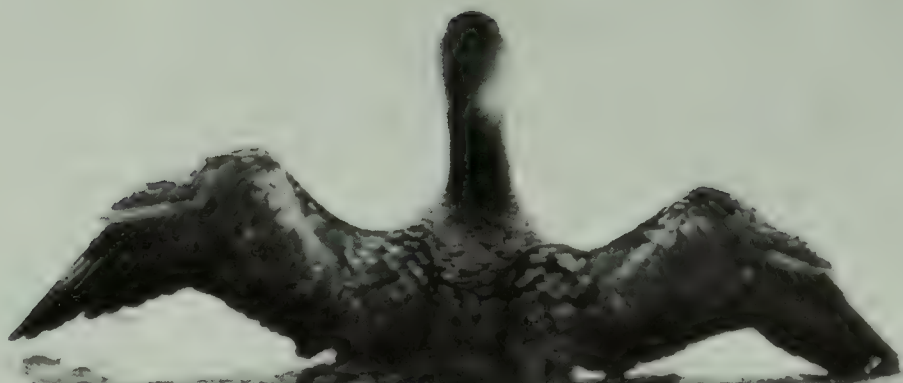
### **White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii*

White-billed is the largest and bulkiest of all the divers (length 76-91 cm; wingspan 137-152 cm), but averages only marginally larger than Great Northern Diver, which it closely resembles in all plumages. Though unlikely to be confused with any species other than Great Northern, the extensively pale sides of the head and neck and the upward carriage of the bill may combine to convey a superficial similarity to Red-throated Diver. In juvenile and winter plumages, White-billed is, on average, *paler than Great Northern, with less definition of light and dark areas on the head and neck* and reduced contrast between the upperparts and the underparts; this is particularly striking in juvenile plumage. At all times, the bill-shape, bill-colour and bill-carriage are critically important identification characteristics. When alert and actively swimming, White-billed *normally carries the bill angled markedly upwards*, but it is often carried level, especially when the bird is relaxed. The forehead bump on White-billed is often even more pronounced than on Great Northern, and the neck is usually thicker-looking.

### *Ageing*

The timing of moults and sequence of plumages in White-billed is practically identical to that of Great Northern Diver; thus, the methods of ageing already discussed under that species can be applied.

As with Great Northern Diver, second-calendar-year individuals moult almost continuously from around February to September. By April, the throat and foreneck become extensively mottled light brown and the collar at the base of the neck becomes complete. Many of the juvenile scapulars



**197.** First-summer White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*, Netherlands, August 1980 (Edward van IJzendoorn)

are shed and replaced with similarly marked, though square-tipped feathers which have pale central blocks and a narrow dark terminal bar. By late summer, the head and neck revert to the extensively pale appearance of juvenile plumage and the first of the fresh adult-winter-type scapulars appear. Those in second-winter plumage closely resemble adults, but lack the white-spotted wing-coverts.

#### *Detailed descriptions*

**ADULT WINTER** Plumage acquired October to January by partial moult in which head and body plumage, tail and some wing-coverts are renewed.

Similar to adult winter Great Northern, but dark on head and neck a shade lighter and demarcation between dark hindneck and light

throat and foreneck less clearly defined. Crown, middle of nape and hindneck are darkest parts of head and neck; viewed from behind, there is usually a characteristic three-toned effect, accentuating dark stripe running down middle of hindneck. Light and dark tones on head and neck merge much more gradually than on Great Northern. Neck and side of head

**198.** Adult White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*, Netherlands, December 1984 (Arnoud B. van den Berg)







199. Juvenile White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*, Netherlands, February 1978 (Jan Mulder)

lighter than on Great Northern, especially lores, ear-coverts and sides of neck, so that, when viewed in profile, general tone of head and neck is lighter than rest of upperparts. Dark collar at base of neck extends farther around sides than on Great Northern, and often continues as light brown wash right around foreneck. Many White-billed Divers show more or less obvious irregular dark patch in region of rear ear-coverts; though not shown by all individuals, it is widely regarded as diagnostic when present.

Upperparts not markedly different from those of Great Northern, though, under optimum viewing conditions, it may be apparent that the slightly more obvious pale blocks on scapulars are longer and the wing-covert spots larger on White-billed than on Great Northern. Occasionally, otherwise fully winter-plumaged White-billed Divers show a few summer-plumage scapulars, when the larger size of the blocks is more easily judged. It seems that White-billed Divers also often retain more of their summer-plumage white-spotted wing-coverts than do Great Northerns. Breast-sides and flanks are similarly patterned to those of Great Northern. Primary shafts of White-billed Diver are always pale cream or whitish, darkening distally; on Great Northern, the exposed shafts are always brownish. This difference

can seldom be seen in the field, but is diagnostic.

On average, bill slightly longer and deeper than that of Great Northern, and viewed against a contrasting dark background, often massive-looking. Not all individuals appear massive-billed, however; on some, only the depth at the base, not the total length, is impressive. Majority have rather straight culmen, with slight decurvature towards tip and more or less pronounced gonys angle. Bill mainly creamy colour; bill tinged pale yellowish distally; at least distal half, if not entire length of culmen, pale ivory-coloured. Base of both mandibles usually quite dark grey, to varying extent, often darkest in tone along top, above and some way beyond nostrils. Never any dark towards distal cutting edges and distal half of culmen on White-billed.

**JUVENILE** Strikingly lighter on head and neck than all except the most heavily bleached spring Great Northern Diver, but it should be borne in mind that the latter can be remarkably pale on head and neck. Only crown, middle of hindneck and basal collar are dark brown, sides of head and neck being predominantly light grey-brown, merging with whitish throat and foreneck. Often a patchy gingery suffusion to sides of head and neck. Most

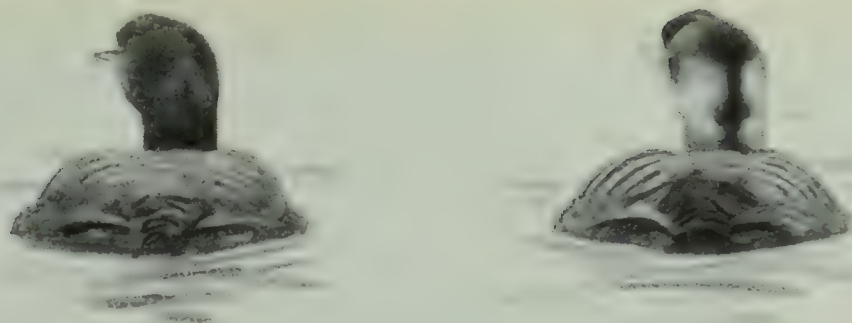


Fig. 7. Juvenile Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer* (left) and juvenile White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* (right) (Killian Mullarney)

show dark patch on rear ear-coverts, which may be very obvious when viewed at long range. Eye isolated from dark crown, giving distinctive facial character reminiscent of adult winter Red-throated Diver. Viewed from behind, sides of upper neck rather light, with dark stripe running down middle (fig. 7). Dusky collar at base of neck often extends forward as gingery wash right around front of neck, setting off clean white breast. Beautifully patterned upper-parts, with broad buffish white tips to feathers,

forming regular series of transverse, scalloped bars, most pronounced across scapulars. Back and rump feathers narrowly tipped lighter and appear more uniformly brownish. Flanks similarly patterned to those of Great Northern Diver. Bill does not develop to full size until bird approximately one year old, so juveniles often have less massive bills than adults. Colour of bill similar to that already described for winter adult.

### Identification

Given good, close views, separation of White-billed and Great Northern Divers is usually not very difficult. There are, however, numerous traps for the unwary, so a thorough and careful approach to the problem is recommended, even with seemingly obvious individuals. Due to the extent of variation found in both species, too much reliance should never be placed on one or two characters alone, particularly if other characters do not seem to support the diagnosis. It is advisable, therefore, to obtain as complete and accurate details as possible before determining identification.

**200.** Juvenile White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*, Netherlands, February 1979 (Hans Schouten)







**201.** Adult White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*, Cleveland, February 1981 (G. P. Catley)

At all times, the most critical identification characters relate to the bill, but there are several plumage distinctions, more marked on juveniles than adults, that hold good for at least the majority of birds. Viewed at long range, the most practical distinguishing feature of White-billed Diver is its lighter-sided head and neck with less definition between light and dark tones than on Great Northern Diver. A majority, particularly those in their first calendar-year, show a more or less extensive dark ear-coverts patch, which is often conspicuous at long range. Special care should be taken from late winter into spring, when excessively worn and/or bleached Great Northern Divers develop poorly defined and sometimes extensive pale

**202.** Adult White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*, Cleveland, February 1981 (P. Vines)



patches on the nape and hindneck, giving them a superficial similarity to White-billed. Juvenile White-billed show more obvious, broader, light bars across their upperparts than do juvenile Great Northern, but, on both species, wear can reduce the prominence of this barring by spring of their second calendar-year.

The differences in bill colour between the two species are not always so obvious under normal viewing conditions as the detailed accounts might suggest. Out of adult summer plumage, the usual bill colour of Great Northern is very pale greyish white with a slight bluish cast. The entire length of the culmen and at least a distal section of the cutting edges are dark. Viewed at long range, it may be impossible to discern any darkness other than where it is most marked (usually the basal portion of the culmen). On White-billed, at least the distal half of the bill is very pale creamy white, usually with a butter-yellow cast. The extent of dusky grey at the base of the bill is variable, but is often dark along the top of the bill above and some way beyond the nostrils. Even though the distal half of the culmen is pale, the apparent extent of dark on the bill when viewed at moderate to long range may be little different from Great Northern Diver (van IJzendoorn 1980, plate 38). Such birds should be checked for traces of dark along the cutting edges of the distal half of the bill, diagnostic of Great Northern Diver.



**203.** First-summer White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*, Netherlands, August 1980 (René Pop)

There is seldom difficulty in distinguishing the two species in breeding plumage. The massive pale bill of White-billed is very obvious, and at close range the coarser white stripes on the neck and larger white blocks and spots on the upperparts may be evident. The bill of Great Northern in breeding plumage is entirely black, but sometimes the glossy surface can create an illusion of the bill being partially or even wholly pale (Grant & Harrison 1978). Identifications should, therefore, not be based solely on the bill colour, but be backed up by a careful check of other characters.



## Flight identification

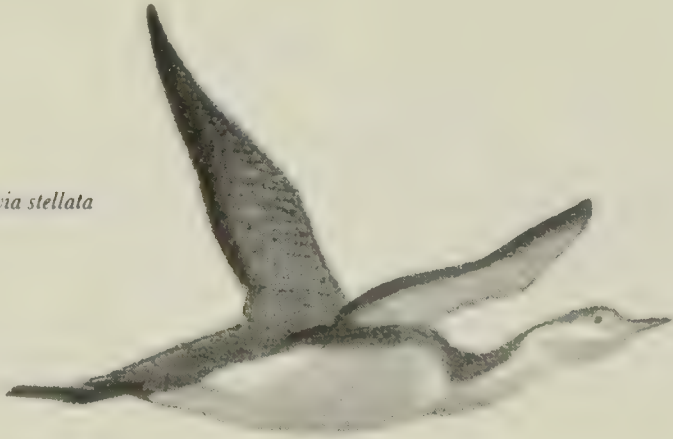
The main problem with identifying flying divers is that views are usually brief or distant, and often both. It is generally not possible to assess accurately the characters that are of most use in distinguishing swimming divers; this leads to identifications based on highly subjective assessments of size and jizz (only seldom will divers settle in view allowing tentative identifications to be confirmed or corrected). At close range, flying divers may be reliably identified by the more obvious characters that distinguish swimming individuals, but, to the inexperienced eye, flying divers of all species at medium to long range take on a remarkably homogeneous appearance. It is therefore necessary to apply a different set of identification criteria which concentrate on the more practical differences between flying birds (e.g. relative lengths in front of and behind the wings, especially the projection of the feet beyond the tail; speed and depth of wing beats; carriage of head and neck; and extent of light and dark on head and neck).

Fig. 8. Flying divers *Gavia* (Killian Mullarney)

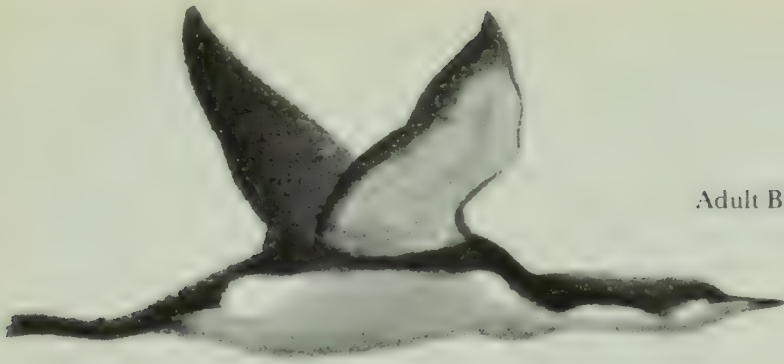


Adult Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

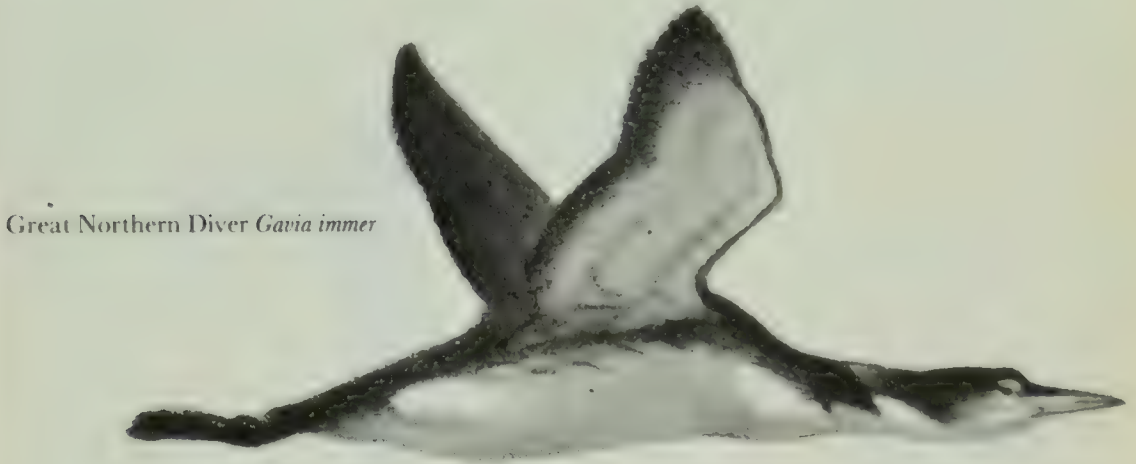
Adult Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*



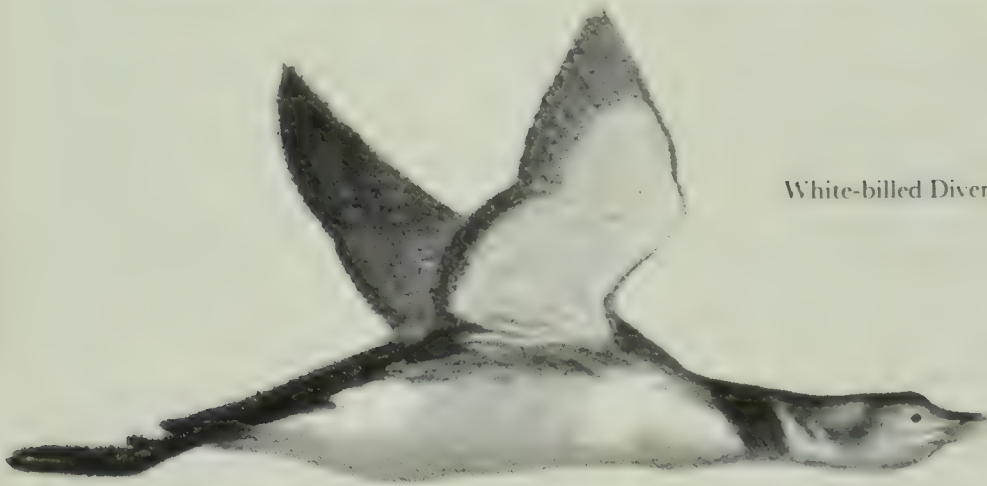
Juvenile Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*



Adult Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*



Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*



White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*

Some of these differences should be considered as no more than 'tendencies' which probably depend on conditions at the time of observation, such as wind speed and direction relative to the bird's trajectory. As with swimming divers, different light conditions can dramatically alter the general appearance of flying individuals, particularly the degree of contrast between the light and dark tones.

There is really no substitute for observing birds in the field in a wide variety of conditions. Even then, it may take a lot of practice to become expert at distinguishing flying divers. It should be borne in mind that several of the observers consulted in the preparation of this paper, some of whom have accumulated a lot of experience of divers in flight, do not claim



to identify specifically more than 40% of those that they see.

The following species accounts are based on our combined experience of flying divers and the views of several experienced seawatchers around Europe. We have also drawn from a number of published papers which have dealt with flight identification of divers, notably Edberg (1960), Porter *et al.* (1963), Parrack (1964), Danielsen (1970), Appleby & Madge (1977), Sutherland (1983), and Blidberg (1983).

### Red-throated Diver



#### 204. Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*, Sweden, March 1979 (Jan Elmelid)

Smaller and slimmer than other divers, but this not easily judged without direct comparison. *Projection of feet beyond tail usually less obvious than on other divers.* This gives appearance of wings being set slightly farther back along body, which, together with fairly quick wing action, is reminiscent of Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*. Neck usually droops obviously below line of body, but Red-throated Diver has *curious habit of frequently jerking head up and down and twisting it slightly sideways*, as though checking to see if it is being followed. Other divers seldom perform this kind of motion.

*Extensive white on head and neck* of those in adult winter plumage is often striking, especially in bright sunlight, when head may appear almost entirely white; against very light sea or sky, may even appear headless (like 'a pair of wings flying along'). *Head and outstretched neck has grey restricted to narrow strip of uniform depth* without any marked widening until as far down as sides of breast. *Viewed from side, depth of white on head and foreneck is approximately twice depth of dark hindneck.* In good light, isolated beady eye may be discernible at surprisingly long range. Up-tilted bill often obvious on flying individuals and probably accentuates angle between lower throat and foreneck.

Juvenile and transitional-plumaged Red-throated Divers show much less extensive white on head and neck and are therefore more likely than

adults to be mistaken for other species. Such individuals often show wide dark collar around middle of neck. Some Red-throated Divers, probably juveniles, similar to Black-throated in extent of light and dark on head and neck, but, usually, divide is less clear-cut, lacking sharp contrast of most Black-throateds. 'Difficult' individuals most reliably distinguished by careful judgment of structure, especially projection of feet, and flight action.

Flight of Red-throated rather more hurried than that of other divers, and wings raised higher on upstroke than those of Black-throated Diver; this most easily judged when they are flying directly towards or away from observer. Much variation in extent of dark flank band that separates light underwing from light underbody: on most, quite broad near base of forewing and narrows towards rear flanks; this pattern also quite common on Black-throated Diver; on a few Red-throateds, band very narrow along entire length, and, rarely, is lacking altogether.

### **Black-throated Diver**

Typically, heavier-looking than Red-throated, but there is considerable overlap in size ranges. To the practised eye, subtly more balanced proportions and *rather stiff, measured wing-beats* of flying Black-throated Divers are amongst most immediate clues to identity. Thicker neck and heavier head are carried more rigidly and more in line with body than by other divers. *Feet project noticeably farther beyond tip of tail than on Red-throated* and often appear slightly expanded at tips of toes. Because of more prominent feet, wings appear more centrally placed than on Red-throated Diver.

In good light conditions, very marked contrast between dark upperparts and white underparts. *Dark on head and neck more extensive than on adult Red-throated and more sharply defined than on juveniles.* Viewed from side, *divide runs approximately mid-way along head and neck*, often with slight widening of dark just behind head.

Compared with typically rakish Red-throated Diver, which can look rather 'elastic' in flight, Black-throated is heavier, its rigid neck and stiff, rather shallow wing beats giving impression of unerring stability.

### **Great Northern Diver**

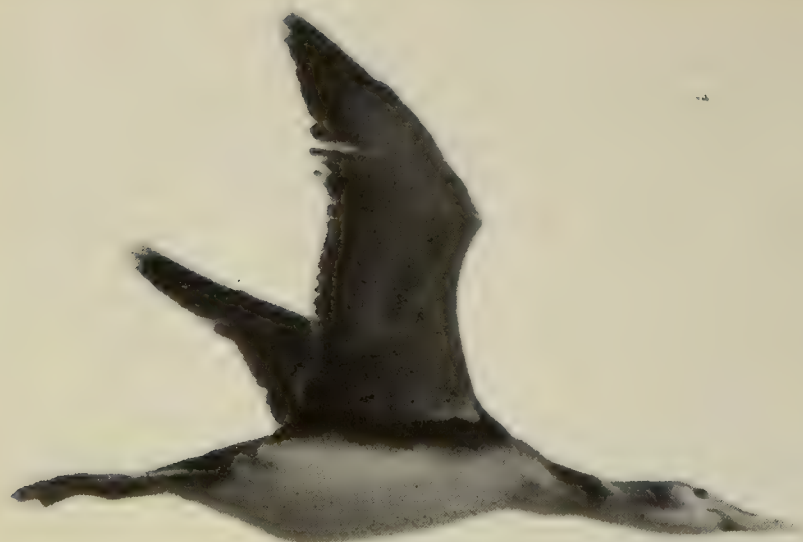
Greater bulk of Great Northern Diver (compared with Black-throated) usually obvious, especially heavier head and neck, broader wings and *very large, prominent feet*. Thick neck usually droops slightly below body level, but is lifted towards head. *Wing-beats slower and less stiff than those of Black-throated* and wings raised quite high on upstroke. Powerful flight is reminiscent of a goose *Anser*. Broad-based wings appear set mid-way along length.

*Dark on head and neck more extensive and less clearly defined than on Black-throated.* If not too distant, it may be possible to discern irregular divide between light and dark on head and neck, especially light indentation half way along neck.

### **White-billed Diver**

Size, structure and flight very similar to Great Northern, if anything even heavier-looking, with slightly slower wing beats. Neck appears slightly





**205.** White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*, Netherlands, February 1979 (*René Pop*)

**206.** White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*,  
Finland, September 1978 (*Jukka Haapala*)



thicker and more drooped, with head and bill raised upwards. *Head and neck paler than Great Northern*, but dark collar at base of neck more obvious. *Head and ear-coverts noticeably pale*, isolated eye being quite conspicuous. This 'light-faced' appearance vaguely reminiscent of Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*. At close range and in good light, large pale bill obvious. Plumage differences between White-billed and Great Northern Divers more pronounced in juvenile and first-winter plumages.

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Haapala, Robin H. Hopper, J. Hornbuckle, H. Hunecker, P. Kennerley, F. P. I. Kooymans, A. Krechmar, Vaughan Lister, Michael Lloyd, J. R. Mather, Richard T. Mills, J. Mulder, P. Munsterman, Howard Nicholls, Gerald J. Oreel, Jeff Pick, René Pop, R. F. Porter, C. Prentice, J. Prescott, J. de Ridder, Iain Robertson, Staffan Rodebrand, R. van Rossum, Hans Schouten, Eckart Schwarze, Arnold Small, R. C. Smith, Norman van Swelm, M. P. Sutherland, W. J. Sutherland, P. Vines, M. R. Weston, P. Wheeler, M. D. Williams and Robin Williams.

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R. H. Appleby, 38 Tennyson Avenue, Scarborough, North Yorkshire  
 S. C. Madge, 2 Church Row, Sheviok, Torpoint, Cornwall PL11 3EH  
 Killian Mullarney, The Mill House, Whitechurch Road, Rathfarnham, Dublin 14,  
 Ireland



# Mystery photographs



**116** The combination of relatively long (but not deep) bill, flat crown, rounded tail and rather plain plumage with no obvious features indicate one of three species of *Acrocephalus* warbler: Marsh *A. palustris*, Reed *A. scirpaceus* or Blyth's Reed *A. dumetorum*. The short primary projection beyond the tips of the tertials with only six primary tips showing clearly, two emarginations falling level with the tertial tips, and the lack of pale fringes to the tertials identify it as Blyth's Reed Warbler. Both Marsh and Reed would show a longer primary projection, with eight primary tips showing, single emargination falling beyond the tertial tips, and pale—though not always obvious—fringes to the tertials. This bird was trapped at Spurn, North Humberside, on 28th May 1984. Perhaps the most surprising feature is the indistinctness of the supercilium 'bulge' in front of the eye, but this is discussed below.

Our paper, 'Field identification of Blyth's Reed Warbler' (*Brit. Birds* 77: 393-411), has had a substantially positive response from other observers. It seems to be an opportune moment to take account of these comments and reflect on our conclusions. Among the many who wrote to us we would particularly like to thank S. C. Harrap and D. I. M. Wallace for their detailed notes. In our paper, we concentrated on a definition of the most useful specific identification features, while emphasising the range of overlap with similar species and the risk of variations from the norm. Some of these deserve underlining here, and we draw particular attention to a second paper by Koskimies ('Polygyny in Blyth's Reed Warbler', *Ann. Zool. Fennici* 21: 239-242) in which he mentions *regularly* finding mixed pairs of Blyth's Reed Warbler and Marsh Warbler in his Finnish study area of only 5 ha. This, taken with the earlier published evidence, must make it conceivable that some of the reported variations are a result of hybridisation.

## Structure

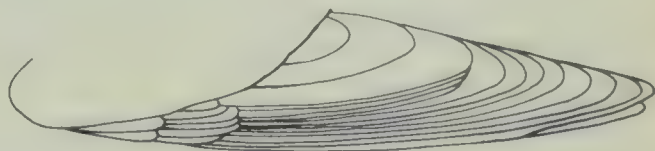
Most observers reaffirm the structural 'jizz' of Blyth's Reed Warbler as a product more of posture than any measurable qualities. Even such con-



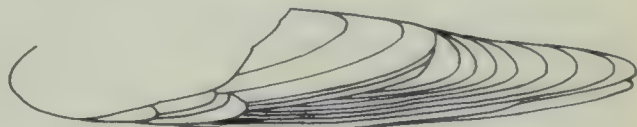
**208.** Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, North Humberside, May 1984 (Geoff Neal)

sistent features as the relatively short projection of the primaries beyond the tips of the tertials can be very difficult to assess accurately in the field. We probably caused some misunderstanding about what needs to be focused on, and therefore illustrate this feature in comparison with the wings of Reed and Marsh Warblers (fig. 1).

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*



Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*



Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*



Fig. 1. Note short primary projection (beyond tips of exposed tertials) of Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, compared with longer projection of Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus* and Marsh Warbler *A. palustris*. Note also on Blyth's Reed two emarginated primaries falling more or less equal with tertial tips and six clear primary tips (with 7 and 8 bunched), compared with eight clear primary tips on both Reed and Marsh Warbler

More observers have reported forming no impression of a long tail. In the past, however, others *have* noted this, but measurements do not support it, and we caution against tail length being taken into consideration in identification.





209. Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, North Humberside, May 1984 (Geoff Neal)

### Plumage

The plainness of the plumage is consistent, and it can look very pale particularly in bright sunlight. A small proportion, particularly in late winter and spring, do show a noticeable olive-green wash, independent of light reflections. First-years may show a rusty wash, but without the sort of rump contrast that the similar species can exhibit.

Although the wings are usually unmarked, some observers have noted slightly darker tertial centres (but not the contrasting pale fringes shown by most Marsh and Reed Warblers). A small percentage seem to have a dark alula.

Variations in the supercilium may include a very indistinct bulge before the eye (as in this photograph), or merely a pale spot. Frequently, the supercilium fades out just behind the eye, but occasionally it will extend farther back than we indicated.

On the underparts, the grey-buff suffusion at the sides may extend to form an indistinct breast band, which creates more of a contrast with the white throat than normal.

### Bare parts

The predominantly dark bill may be strikingly enhanced by the restricted pale base to the lower mandible. This combination is rarely seen on either Marsh or Reed Warbler.

Variations from the normal greyish leg colour and foot colour include dull flesh and a combination of greyish feet and dull flesh legs. Close examination may reveal paler components which are not evident at longer ranges.

### Voice

Voice remains one of the most frustrating characters to describe. We both hear a distinct initial fricative, making a 'thik' call. Others describe the

same call as 'tchk', 'tchick' and 'chack'. What is striking to everyone, at least where the species is common, is the persistent nature of the call. There is a wider range of Reed and Marsh Warbler calls than we indicated, but rarely do they match the persistence of Blyth's Reed.



210. Male Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, Finland, summer (Tapani Räsänen)

### Summary

We would not wish to change our checklist of important features, and restate it here, but with some cautionary tags:

1. Concolorous wings, with no contrasting pale fringes or, usually, darker alula (but a few individuals can show darkish, but not contrasting, centres to the tertials and, a small number, a darker alula).
2. Uniform, cold olive-grey-brown upperparts, with no rump contrast (though some can show a rusty or olive-green wash to the upperparts).
3. Rounded wings, with short primary projection.
4. Short but distinct supercilium which bulges in front of the eye, and short, dusky eye-stripe (on some, the bulge may be very indistinct and the supercilium may extend behind the eye, but never far).
5. Mainly dark, tapering bill (flesh-coloured base to lower mandible may be obvious in contrast).
6. Usually grey tarsus, feet and claws (a small proportion can show dull flesh-coloured legs).
7. Active tail movements.
8. Distinctive, frequently uttered 'thik' contact- or feeding-call (to some people, this call is closer to 'tchck' or 'chak', but the important point is the persistence with which the call is repeated).
9. Frequently adopted 'banana posture'.

Many of the structural and plumage features are shown in Tapani Räsänen's excellent photograph (plate 210).



Blyth's Reed Warbler remains a difficult species to identify in the field, and we thank those who are contributing to the discussion. We have heard of, but not seen documented, British records of the eastern race of Reed Warbler *A. s. fuscus*, which still presents the most-likely risk of confusion. The 1984 Spurn Blyth's Reed Warbler was the first spring record for Britain and Ireland; we hope it will presage more, which are likely to sing and therefore remove all identification doubts.

W. G. HARVEY and R. F. PORTER  
11 Summer Hill, Harbledown, Canterbury, Kent CT2 8NH



211. Mystery photograph 117. Identify the species. Answer next month

## Product reports

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Items included in this feature have been submitted by the manufacturers or their agents. The reviews are the personal opinions of the reviewers; they are not the result of technical tests, but are assessments made after use in the appropriate conditions (e.g. in the field). Neither *British Birds* nor the individual reviewers can accept responsibility for any adverse consequences of opinions stated, and items are accepted for review on this understanding. We aim, however, to be helpful both to our readers and to the manufacturers of goods used by birdwatchers. Eds

### Greenkat 'Eyas' 7×40 ZCF binoculars

Less than 13cm in height, these handy binoculars immediately give a favourable impression: neat and comfortable to hold, light (695g), yet chunky and with a solid 'feel' suggesting that they will take the normal

bumps of birdwatching in their stride. The broad focusing wheel moves very smoothly, and focusing can be achieved from distance down to a range of only 5m by a turn of only two-thirds of a revolution (excellent for quick focusing). The body of the binocular is 'rubber-armoured'. Optically, the entire field of view is clear (advertised as 114m at 1,000m) and performance is far better than one would expect of a binocular costing as little as £70-£80. There are fold-down rubberised eye-cups. The plastic rainguard, however, does not fit over the eye-pieces unless the binocular is 'closed up': unsuitable for the birdwatcher who requires instant usability. This is the only quibble.

The *Greenkat* 'Eyas' 7×40 ZCF seems excellent value for money.

J. T. R. SHARROCK

## Notes

### Apparent feeding association between Manx Shearwaters and Sandwich Terns

The note on apparent feeding association between Gannet *Sula bassana* and Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* (*Brit. Birds* 76: 573) recalls the following. On 16th April 1982, on Shell Island, Gwynedd, I observed three small rafts of Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* and a party of six Sandwich Terns *Sterna sandvicensis* feeding close inshore. On several occasions, as one of the terns searched for food from a height of about 10 m, a raft of shearwaters skimmed the surface a short distance behind and flew in the same direction; as the tern plunged, they immediately made for the spot where it had hit the water and plunge-dived briefly close to the tern as it left the surface, but did not attempt to rob it. This behaviour was repeated three or four times by the same raft of shearwaters before normal food-searching was resumed. Owing to the distance involved, it was not possible to judge the success of this apparent association, although the two species may have been seeking sprats *Clupea sprattus*, a food common to both.

ALAN K. DOLPHIN

27 Stencills Road, Walsall, West Midlands

**Water Rail feeding on passerines in garden** During hard weather in January 1984, my two sons and I witnessed some rather extraordinary behaviour by a Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* at the bird-feeding site in our garden in Doncaster, South Yorkshire. The food is placed on the ground instead of on a birdtable; there are no cats in the area, and rats *Rattus* are not tolerated. An area of about 8m has food spread over it; this is about 1½ m from the sitting-room window, from where the observations were made. The ground slopes down from the garden to the 'Mother Drain', from which the rail made its visits. The weather at the time was very cold, snow







Carrying dead House Sparrow  
*Passer domesticus*



Catching prey



Picking up carcass of House Sparrow  
*Passer domesticus*



Carrying prey

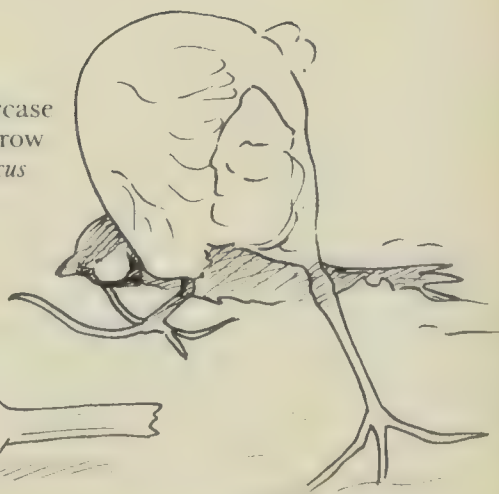


Catching Greenfinch  
*Carduelis chloris*



Inspecting carcass

Picking up carcass  
of House Sparrow  
*Passer domesticus*



almost 8cm deep surrounded the feeding site, and the water in the drain was frozen.

On 23rd January, the rail came over the edge of the garden, spent two or three minutes chasing passerines, then went off down the bank of the drain. Five minutes later, it returned, pecked at the flaked maize in the food lying around, and again started to chase passerines; it caught a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* and took it down the bank of the drain. About an hour later, I went down the bank and found blood stains in the snow which led to the sparrow lying on the ice; a fair-sized cavity had been pecked into one side of its breast. The rail returned to the prey 30 minutes later. A Magpie *Pica pica* also arrived in a tree overlooking the rail; it flew down to the rail and then off over the drain, presumably with the sparrow because, soon afterwards, the rail returned to the feeding site, ran around among the passerines and quickly caught another sparrow, which it took down the drain bank. The Magpie was on the ice and, although not seen to take the prey, it obviously did so as the rail again came up to the feed site and started chasing the passerines; it caught a Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* which, after a brief struggle, escaped minus a few feathers. The rail went off down the drain bank, but was soon back chasing passerines, this time without success. As it walked away, it disgorged something resembling a worm (in the prevailing weather conditions, it is doubtful if it was a worm, but more likely a piece of intestine) and another item which proved to be the upper and lower mandibles and a fragment of skull of a sparrow. The rail picked up the worm-like object and swallowed it. It nonchalantly grabbed a hen Greenfinch as it walked back to the Mother Drain. It was now dusk, and no further sightings were made.

At 08.00 GMT on 24th January, the rail arrived at the feeding site and caught and killed a hen Greenfinch, which it brought to the side of the house below the window; 30 minutes later, it was disturbed and flew down the bank, leaving a partly eaten carcass; an hour later, the carcass had been removed. In an effort to prevent further killing, I took two House Sparrow road casualties from the freezer and put them at the feeding site. At about 10.00 hours, the rail came and took one; about noon, it took the other. It returned again at about 15.00 hours, caught a Tree Sparrow *P. montanus* by the neck, and went off down the bank with the sparrow squawking. It was now dusk.

On 25th January, I took three carcasses out to the feeding site. At 08.00, the rail came and picked up a Greenfinch carcass, which it took down the bank, across the ice on the drain and part way up the opposite bank. Later, it took the carcass of a Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*, with which it was seen on the ice. It subsequently took another carcass, this time of a Goldfinch *C. carduelis*; it was seen to peck at this, pick it up and shake it, and again peck at it. A passing Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* took a peck at the carcass, but did not eat any of it. The rail was later seen on the ice, where it started to chase House Sparrows; one flew up into some brambles on the bank and the rail jumped 1 m high in an attempt to catch it, but was not successful. At 13.30 hours, the rail came up the bank, pecked at the carcass of a Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, then went away; it returned about 1½ hours later, but did



not stay. I noticed that the rail, when just walking about, was rather like a Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, with its tail cocked and its head drawn back towards its body; when chasing birds, it held its body horizontal, with head low and stretched forward and tail down, rather like a Corncrake *Crex crex*.

On 26th January, a slow thaw was taking place. The rail took a sparrow in the morning, and a second one later; in the afternoon, it took a Greenfinch carcass. It fed several times on soaked flake maize. On 27th, the slow thaw continued. The rail took a sparrow carcass, was not seen to catch any prey, but came to the feeding site several times during the day and fed on maize. The thaw continued the next day, although freezing occurred at night; the rail fed several times on maize. On 29th, the rail was again feeding on maize. On the following day, the snow had almost gone and the rail fed on maize.

On 31st January, the Mother Drain was still frozen. The Water Rail came and took maize early in the morning and later in the afternoon, once feeding in the company of several Moorhens. Flaked maize now seemed to have become its main food.

I had by now realised that the rail was successful at catching birds, but not always successful in despatching them. The prey, once caught in its beak, was apt to escape when the rail tried to change its grip or when it tried to stab them. I now thought that more of the birds escaped than I had first believed. For the last few days I left a carcass or two at the feeding site, but the rail ignored these as it passed on to the maize. It was noticeable that, as soon as the thaw commenced, the Water Rail ignored carcasses and made no effort to chase small birds, but started feeding on flaked maize.

R. H. Wood

*The Soss, Misterton, Doncaster DN10 4DQ*

**Action taken by Little Ringed Plovers in securing most suitable site in which to rear young** In 1983, at Shepperton, Middlesex, I saw a pair of Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* apparently deliberately take over a feeding territory from a single adult with two juveniles. When my observations started, the latter were in possession of an area of approximately 160 m<sup>2</sup> divided into almost two equal parts of sand and gravel separated by an irregular depression holding water. The gravel had a sparse amount of weed growing on it. A pair with a clutch of four eggs 130 m away hatched out their young soon after my watching began, and during the following nine days they all progressed slowly across a sandy area towards the territory of the single adult. On the tenth day, I arrived to a scene of great commotion: the three adult plovers were fighting, often giving threat postures, darting in at each other, and sometimes fluttering up together, feet to the fore; contact was presumably made at times, as the odd feather was seen drifting away in the breeze. I watched for an hour, during which time the adults circled each other, challenging and calling all the time. The young carried on feeding nearby, apparently unconcerned. When I next visited, two days later, the pair and their four young were well established as the new occupants of this disputed territory; the vanquished had

dispersed onto the sandy area. Concealment on the gravel in this feeding territory seemed to be the main reason for its apparent desirability: there was adequate food and water elsewhere, but very little protection by way of camouflage.

During this same period, another pair of Little Ringed Plovers was incubating four eggs on the sand; 18 days after the above episode, the newly hatched chicks were taken in the opposite direction and remained in the sandy area, which by now had a fair amount of weed cover. This move also took them closer to some bordering bushes on which a recently fledged family of Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* was quite frequently seen. The whole brood had disappeared within five days; I saw the last two chicks being taken, both within a 30-minute period, by one of the Kestrels.

I wonder whether a gravel background would have offered better protection? These last chicks also had the disadvantage of having only one adult left with them very soon after hatching.

R. A. HOLLEYMAN

339 Laleham Road, Shepperton, Middlesex TW17 0JS

**Lapwing chick entangled in breast feathers of adult** On the evening of 31st May 1983, on Fetlar, Shetland, I was driving slowly along a road when I noticed a brooding Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* a few metres from the edge. As I gently drew alongside, it jumped up and took off, landing behind an adjacent fence some 8-10 m from my car. I could see a crouching brood of three tiny chicks less than one day old at the spot where the adult had been sitting. The adult, a female, was running back and forth, calling frantically, and it was then that I noticed something dragging under her belly, between her legs. I expected this to be a hentilag (a fragment of prematurely shed sheep's fleece), something which often causes crippling injuries to breeding waders on Fetlar. To my astonishment, however, I could see through binoculars that it was a chick, its head hidden in the adult's breast feathers, but its body dragging backwards and kicking up off the heathery terrain, with legs flailing as its parent ran to and fro. The adult was almost tripping over her entrapped chick; twice she stopped and very purposefully tried to free it by pushing it out with her bill, but to no avail. Thinking that the chick might be freed if I startled the adult, I jumped out of my car and clapped my hands. The adult took off, but the chick did not break free: it went for an involuntary flight, swinging by its neck as the adult circled 10-15 m above me. I quickly ringed the three crouching chicks. When I turned to look at the adult, I saw that the entrapped chick had disappeared and must have fallen to the ground. I searched the area for a while, but the chances of finding it in the very uneven terrain were slim; I expected it to be dead or badly injured and, to allow the parent to get back to her three healthy chicks, I returned to my car and drove off. Early the next morning, I walked towards the same area and found the female Lapwing brooding chicks about 20 m from where I had ringed them. To my surprise, there were two ringed chicks and one perfectly healthy unringed one, which I ringed. I retired to a vantage point about 150 m away and eventually saw the fourth, ringed, chick emerge and join the other three. Clearly, the unringed chick's



hazardous adventure had not harmed it. Neither in the evening nor in the following morning did I notice a male Lapwing, although he may well have been overlooked if he was alarm-calling from adjacent overgrown pasture.

J. N. DYMOND

*c/o 71C School Lane, Corsham Road, Shaw, Melksham, Wiltshire*

**Turnstones feeding on cliff ledge** On 23rd December 1982, from the beach near Bridlington, Humberside, I became aware of a steady stream of stones falling around me. On looking up, I saw five Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* feeding on ledges in the chalk cliffs at heights of 10m to 15m; they were dislodging flattened stones up to 8cm across. They had presumably found a rich source of food, as it was low tide and large areas of undisturbed seaweed were available.

CHRIS GIBSON

*Nature Conservancy Council, East Anglia Region Sub-office,  
Centurion House, St John's Street, Colchester CO2 7AH*

**What won't Turnstones eat?** The Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* probably has one of the most varied diets of any wader species. Besides the 'normal' foods taken (see, e.g., Prater 1972, Nettleship 1973, Jones 1975), a considerable variety of 'unusual' foods and feeding behaviours has also been reported. Items taken include soap, gull excrement, dog food, potato peels, cheese, oatmeal, and the flesh of dead animals, including birds, a sheep *Ovis*, a wolf *Lupus*, a cat *Felis*, and a human corpse (Bell 1961; Campbell 1966; King 1961, 1964, 1982; King 1982; MacDonald & Parmelee 1962; Mercer 1966; Selway & Kendall 1965; Spencer 1966).

Armed with this information, I began, in spring 1983, a study of waders along the Chukchi Sea coast 80 km southwest of Barrow, Alaska. My camp was located at the distal end of a 22-km long, sparsely vegetated, uninhabited sandspit. On 13th June, I saw a flock of eight adult Turnstones foraging in the sand within 3-4 m of the front door of my tent. I thought it odd that these waders, the only Turnstone flock I had seen all summer, should feed so close to the only human 'residence' in such a vast area. Other waders fed at other sites along the spit where food resources were ample. On closer observation, I found that the Turnstones were feeding on grains of cooked rice discarded with the dishwater the day before. Recognising that they had probably been attracted by my presence, I immediately prepared for my dinner guests entrées of seedless raisins, two freshly chopped cloves of garlic, and commercially prepared dry cereal consisting primarily of honey-coated rolled oats. These I scattered over the area where the birds had initially been seen feeding, and later that evening and again the next morning several Turnstones were seen feeding on the items. On 14th June, I was away from camp most of the day; on my return I found the waders roosting nearby, but could find no remains of the food I had cast in front of the tent and can only assume that it had all been eaten by the Turnstones. Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* were the only other birds seen about camp, and it is highly unlikely that they would have consumed such items. No mammals were found along the occasionally tide-washed spit other than

arctic fox *Alopex lagopus* and polar bear *Thalarctos maritimus*, and no sign of either was detected about the camp during the previous week.

Considering these and previous findings, why should Turnstones, among all waders, be so attracted to human habitations and so indiscriminate in their tastes? The evolution of such highly opportunistic feeding behaviour has probably been advanced by a combination of (1) the adaptation of the bill for picking, prying, and tearing (rather than probing) 'natural' foods along the rocky intertidal, the principal habitat used by the species for about ten months of the year, and (2) the subsequent occupation of this same habitat by human beings. With man's occupation came waste products, many of which were easily mandibulated by Turnstone-type bills and were strewn in the same microhabitats as the Turnstone's natural foods. It appears that Turnstones have quickly learned that accessible food resources are likely to be found near human habitations, and this has led to an oddly diversified diet. It will be interesting to note the outcome of such plasticity in this species' behaviour in the centuries to come.

ROBERT E. GILL, JR

*US Fish & Wildlife Service, Alaska Office of Fish and Wildlife Research,  
1011 E. Tudor Road, Anchorage, Alaska 99503, USA*

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**Short-eared Owl mortality on roads** On several occasions during November-February 1982/83, Mike Willgress travelled the A47 road in Norfolk between the Stracey Arms, near Acle, and Yarmouth (known as the Acle Straight). The purpose of his early-morning trips was to collect avian corpses suitable for stuffing. During this period, he counted at least 12 dead Short-eared Owls *Asio flammeus*, all of which were road casualties; he also heard, from a secondary source, of at least a further three corpses. The stretch of road, 8km in length, traverses the Halvergate Marshes and is bordered by dykes. The total would undoubtedly have been higher if time had allowed a more thorough search of the roadside verge/dyke system and if frequency of visits had been greater. During the 1982/83 winter, numbers of Short-eared Owls were average for this particular part of Norfolk.

The openness of the landscape and the lack of tall vegetation, especially



along the roadside, would apparently act unfavourably: owls flying around the marshes would see a flat landscape into which the busy trunk road had merged and, therefore, would not be aware of the hazards of hunting the area. I cannot trace any reference to such a high level of mortality. The *Norfolk Bird Report* for 1973 listed 111 bird road casualties for the same stretch (period unknown), including 51 Moorhens *Gallinula chloropus* and 36 Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus*, but no Short-eared Owls; similarly, the 1975 report listed 117 casualties, with 40 Moorhens and 36 Black-headed Gulls heading the list, but again no Short-eared Owls.

B. D. HARDING

6 Braydeston Avenue, Brundall, Norfolk NR13 5JX

**Long stay of Short-eared Owls at offshore oilrig** From 11th to 25th October 1982, while on board the BP Exploratory Drilling Rig *Divi Sigma*, then in German waters about 160 km north of Heligoland, I observed up to four Short-eared Owls *Asio flammeus* roosting on the structure of the rig. During foggy periods at this time, there were frequent arrivals of passerines, mainly Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla*, Redwings *Turdus iliacus*, Fieldfares *T. pilaris* and Chaffinches *F. coelebs*, which spent the daylight hours resting and foraging around the galley rubbish container. At dusk, the passerines started to fly around the rig, and, shortly afterwards, the owls could be seen on the same circuit in among them. On two occasions, I saw the owls catching small birds by sticking out one leg and seizing them in flight. Redwings and Bramblings were caught in this manner, their partly eaten remains being found on deck. At least two owls were present throughout this two-week period and one was still present two weeks later, having been seen by others, and was then observed by myself for a further ten days. The last owl was seen on 16th November.

It seems unusual that the owls, presumably migrating from Scandinavia to either north Germany or eastern England, should remain so long on a rig. Other birds, including raptors, usually depart as soon as weather permits. Even the large food supply was not constant, because on days with good weather the passerine count fell from over 1,000 to under ten very shortly after dawn.

I am grateful to B. Barclay and M. Richardson for their observations and notes.

G. H. BROOKS

4 Wislington Close, Lower Earley, Reading RG6 3BN

**Croaking call of Nightingale** The note by A. P. Radford (*Brit. Birds* 78: 196) prompts me to record the following. In both August 1978 and 1979, at Dungeness, Kent, I heard on many occasions the low, rasping croak that Nightingales *Luscinia megarhynchos* emit. In neither year did this species breed at Dungeness, these birds being purely migrants. In addition, after each croak, a single, up-slurred sweet whistle was heard. A number of croak-whistles were made one after the other, always at dawn or dusk. On one occasion, two individuals were heard calling together in this manner.

During 1980-82, single pairs of Nightingales did breed at Dungeness, and again I heard these calls. It is interesting, in the light of A. P. Radford's note, that (1) these croaks were always followed by whistles, and (2) these calls were made by migrants (the presence of a breeding pair at Dungeness in 1978 and 1979 can be eliminated as intensive fieldwork was carried out during the spring/summer).

S. W. GALE

Flat 8, 86 Worcester Road, Sutton, Surrey SM2 6QQ

**Song Thrush chipping ice** In February 1980, in the centre of Norwich, Norfolk, I watched a Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* over a period of five minutes chipping small pieces of ice and snow from the top of a wall and swallowing them. This was during a time of hard weather, and one can only surmise that its actions were to compensate for the lack of available water.

B. D. HARDING

6 Braydeston Avenue, Brundall, Norwich NR13 5JX

Many bird species, including Redwing *T. iliacus* and Blackbird *T. merula*, have been recorded eating snow when no water is available, but the chipping of ice does appear to be unusual. Eds

**Effect of migrant Icterine Warbler on local breeding warblers** At 08.30 GMT on 18th June 1983, at Margate, Kent, I located an Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* singing vigorously at a derelict reverted industrial site overgrown with scrub and bushes with some coppice and young trees. It continued to sing throughout the morning. Although I had often heard singing Icterine Warblers abroad, the content of this individual's song seemed more varied and certainly more mimetic than usual, and it appeared to be trying to establish a territory in an area of coppiced beech *Fagus sylvatica* and sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* with low scrub. A pair of Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla* had established a territory at this site since early May, and their fledged young had been observed there the previous day. Although little in the Icterine's song was suggestive of Blackcap, the male Blackcap continually challenged the newcomer in song, often chasing it into trees and 'singing at it', at times from as close as 50 cm. Consequently, the Icterine Warbler became very restless, making observation difficult, and usually only brief flight views were obtained.

An hour after my locating the Icterine Warbler, it took up residence in an area of much lower scrub and bushes 30-40 m from its initial position. At this new site, the male of a pair of Whitethroats *S. communis* continued the challenge, like the Blackcap appearing to pursue the new arrival. In my opinion, the opening snatch of the Icterine's song was vaguely reminiscent of the Whitethroat's normal flight song. From 10.15 hours, the Icterine Warbler became more subdued, to the extent that I was once able to approach it to within 2 m as it sang deep down in a low bush. Although occasional 'rattles' and 'whistles' were subsequently heard, these did not appear to disconcert a pair of breeding Lesser Whitethroats *S. curruca* into



whose territory the Icterine eventually settled. In the afternoon and evening, only two brief snatches of song were heard from the Icterine Warbler, at 12.50 and 17.18 hours. On the following day, it had gone.

This observation raised two points of interest. The late arrival of the Icterine Warbler coincided with a period of comparative inactivity in regard to song from the four species of warbler breeding at the site: Lesser Whitethroat, Whitethroat, Blackcap and Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*. The Icterine's song had almost certainly induced the vigorous response, vocally and physically, from the Blackcap and Whitethroat males, even though its content was not mimetic of the species it had disturbed. Both Blackcap and Whitethroat had been observed feeding fledged young during the previous day or two. On the other hand, the Icterine had provoked no response from the male Lesser Whitethroat, even though it settled into the latter's territory for the greater part of the day; the female Lesser Whitethroat was still on eggs. Although a family party of Chiffchaffs was present throughout the day, the singing habits of the male seemed normal.

D. C. GILBERT

64 Tivoli Park Avenue, Margate, Kent CT9 5TH

## Letter

**Identification of bird sounds** As one who has been recording bird sounds for many years, I very much support M. J. Rogers' view ('Points of view', *Brit. Birds* 78: 188) that it is up to all of us to set new standards in the reporting of these vocalisations.

The importance of song and calls in relation to the study of avian behaviour as a whole is admirably set out in the 'Voice' section of the 'Introduction' to *BWP* (vol. 1), but so are the difficulties of describing sound in words that are both accurate and unambiguous. I suggest that words, in any language, are unlikely ever to be entirely suitable for adequate transcription of sound. Reference to the widely differing descriptions of individual species in any collection of books will support this view.

One of the greatest difficulties we have is that of hearing what birds say with any degree of accuracy, because birds can use sound with both temporal and frequential variations so rapid that we are unable to detect them with our relatively imperfect hearing system. The spectrographic analysis of tape recordings reproduced as sonagrams in *BWP* demonstrates this dramatically.

I am not sure exactly what the stethoscope-sized aural equivalent of the binocular proposed by M. J. Rogers is expected to do, but I suspect that we

will all have to make do with tape recorders for quite some time yet—and there are some reasonably small ones to be had.

There can be little doubt of the need to pay much more attention to this very much neglected subject (about one-third of all the birds in the world have never had their voices recorded at all), but we should make use of the advances that have already been made. Sonagrams have some limitations, but no doubt they will be developed and improved in due course; in the meantime, they can teach us a great deal about what birds say, and can help us all to set new standards in this field.

I wonder how many people who own, or have access to, volume 1 of *BWP* have actually read the Voice section of the Introduction? I recommend it to both the 'good-on-calls' and the 'no-good-on-calls'.

T. C. WHITE

6c Rosebery Avenue, Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 2QP

## Seventy-five years ago...

"LUMINOUS OWLS."—In the *Irish Naturalist* (1911, pp. 124-26) Miss M. E. Dobbs has an article describing lights frequently seen at Villierstown (co. Waterford), which appeared to emanate from birds of some kind. It is curious that no one has so far been able to procure one of these "luminous" birds, and until this has been done the cause of the "luminosity" must remain a matter for speculation.' (*Brit. Birds* 5: 84, August 1911)

## Announcements

**'BB'-Sunbird exploratory trip to Cyprus** A special trip, suggested by Bill Oddie (who will accompany the group unless last-minute TV commitments prevent his involvement), will visit Cyprus for about a week in mid April 1987. To try to ensure that there are sufficient participants, the trip will be open to anyone, but *'BB' subscribers will receive a 10% discount off the usual 'Sunbird' price.*

Falls of migrants can be spectacular on Cyprus at this time of year, with huge numbers in the right weather conditions, as well as great variety. This reconnaissance trip will investigate a number of different localities in a wide variety of habitats.

Participants can expect to see Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*, Spur-winged Plover *Hoplopterus spinosus*, Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*, Pied Wheatear *O. (pleschanka) cypriaca* (perhaps a distinct species), Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax*, Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*, Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia*, and regular Mediterranean migrants such as Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* and Roller *Coracias garrulus*. The following are almost as certain: Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Little Crane *Porzana parva*, Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*, Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha*



*bimaculata*, Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*, Rüppell's Warbler *Sylvia rueppelli*, Orphean Warbler *S. hortensis*, Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* and Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*. There is also the strong likelihood of a variety of vagrant species such as Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*, Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* and Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata*. This trip will, however, be breaking new ground, so participants will need to be prepared for surprises!

Anyone who would like further details should write to BB-Sunbird Cyprus Trip, c/o David Fisher, Sunbird, PO Box 76, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 1DF.

**ICBP** The conservation work of the International Council for Bird Preservation is often quoted in, for instance, 'News and comment', but it may not be fully appreciated that it depends for its funds on financial help from individual birdwatchers as well as support from ornithological organisations. *British Birds* is pleased to announce the start of co-operation between *BB* and the ICBP. Inserted with this issue, you will find a copy of a leaflet outlining the work of the ICBP. We hope that readers will consider taking out ICBP Associate, Supporting or Sustaining Membership, to help this organisation in its worldwide work in bird protection and habitat conservation. The address for further details is ICBP, 219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DL.

## Request

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**Swifts and Pallid Swifts in November 1984** Concurrent with the appearance of Pallid Swifts *Apus pallidus* in Britain in November 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 79: 209), there was also a small arrival of Swifts *Apus apus*. The Rarities Committee would like to collect all records of swifts during this late autumn influx; please send details of sighting to M. J. Rogers, 4 Pentland Flats, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly TR21 0HY.

## Reviews

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**The Fall of a Sparrow. By Sálím Ali.** Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1985. xv + 265 pages; 72 black-and-white photographs. £10.00.

This is the autobiography of one of the world's most celebrated (and aged) ornithologists and conservationists. Dr Sálím Ali recounts the chief events in his remarkable and productive life—more than 80 years of chasing birds—in this lively and entertaining book. We learn how the young Sálím Ali's interest in birds was partly prompted by his boyhood shooting of an unfamiliar sparrow among the local Bombay House Sparrows. The (then largely expatriate)

officers of the Bombay Natural History Society helped him to identify the bird as a Yellow-throated Sparrow and further encouraged his interest throughout his formative years.

After an interlude managing a business in Southern Burma, Sálím Ali returned to take up a precarious existence as a full-time ornithologist. He worked under Stresemann and, returning again to India, embarked upon a series of ornithological surveys in the various Indian princely states. At this time, he already found that he was as interested in documenting birds' habits and ecology as he was in collecting specimens for taxonomic and faunistic studies. He also found time to visit Afghanistan and Tibet and, after Independence, took on the Curatorship of BNHS. The book is packed with anecdotes involving a variety of amusing and colourful characters including his various relatives and the irascible Col. Meinertzhagen. We also learn about Sálím Ali's long-standing friendships with Loke Wan Tho and Dillon Ripley, among many others.

Sálím Ali's eventful life started out when wildlife was unbelievably abundant, when forests and huge tracts of wilderness still covered many parts of the Indian Subcontinent. How has he come to terms with nature's shrinking frontiers in today's overpopulated world? The answer seems to be with grace, good humour and an unflagging commitment to halt and even reverse the trend. For while the love for and tolerance of wildlife, especially birds, in India is due partly to that country's cultural heritage, there is no doubt that Dr Sálím Ali and the BNHS have done an enormous amount to promote conservation in their country. That India is one of the world leaders in wildlife conservation, in spite of the enormous problems it faces, is in no small measure due to their innovative efforts. What other country's Prime Ministers, for example, have shown such a direct interest in conservation of wildlife and the environment?

Perhaps the author could have been more explicit concerning his more recent activities and those of his colleagues in the BNHS, though that would doubtless fill a book in itself. Also, I should have liked to have found more detail concerning the actual 'thrills and spills' of the ornithological chase. Nevertheless, the author's powers of recollection are remarkable. This is, indeed, a well-written book and you will almost certainly enjoy it, regardless of whether you have ever watched birds in India.

PHILIP D. ROUND

**Inventaire des Espèces d'Oiseaux Occasionnelles en France. By Philippe J. Dubois and Pierre Yésou.** Secrétariat de la Faune et de la Flore, Paris, 1986. 203 pages; 35 black-and-white plates; 68 line-drawings; 48 maps; 48 histograms. Paperback 75 F.

Despite a relevant 'O' level pass from 30 years ago, my ability to cope with French is only marginally better than my inability to cope with German. Nevertheless, although this book is wholly in French, it is an essential buy for anyone interested in vagrancy patterns and the records of rarities in that part of the Continent closest to Britain and Ireland.

For the rarer rarities, individual records are listed in full; for the commoner rarities, records are shown by different sizes of dot within each département on large-scale maps of France, and the distribution of records through the year is shown by ten-day periods as histograms. Thus, one can see at a glance that Pectoral Sandpipers *Calidris melanotos* have occurred mostly in the northwestern and western parts of France, in mid and late September, whereas Red-rumped Swallows *Hirundo daurica* have occurred mostly in the areas bordering the Mediterranean, in April and May.

This compilation will provide hours of browsing for anyone interested in the patterns of occurrence of rarities, and it is an essential work of reference for students of European ornithology.

J. T. R. SHARROCK

**The Birds of Hertfordshire. By Tom Gladwin and Bryan Sage.** Castlemead, Ware, 1986. 364 pages; four colour plates; 28 photographs; 43 commissioned drawings by Peter Walton; 60 tables; 24 diagrams. £17.50.

This book updates that by Sage (1959), incorporating a wealth of additional data from the last 25 years. The authors have left no stone unturned in their quest for ornithological facts and figures relating to Hertfordshire, and throughout they have written in great detail.



In line with the standard format of county avifaunas, the early chapters, some 33 pages, deal with geography, geology, weather and habitats of the county, migration and movement, status changes and an analysis of the county list. A total of 21 useful habitat photographs is included.

The systematic list takes up 253 pages, covering 292 species, and is most comprehensive; not surprisingly, the length of text for the commoner species reflects the amount of study that has been carried out. Totals of 60 tables and 24 graphs and histograms are included, presenting a mass of data from Rye Meads Ringing Station (in operation since 1962), and analyses of wildfowl counts, single-species breeding surveys, migration patterns and so on.

The last chapter describes the methods, and reproduces all the maps from the *Hertfordshire Breeding Bird Atlas* (Mead & Smith 1982). There are 15 appendices, which include further detailed counts of ducks, Coots, Lapwings and gulls, a site gazetteer, maps of gravel-pits in the two main river valleys, and a selected list of 1983 and 1984 records that were too late for inclusion in the main text.

The book feels good, its content is very well laid out, and I was unable to find any printing errors. The four colour plates of birds are good, but the selection of six black-and-white bird-photographs is disappointing, especially as three of them are duplicated by vignettes. I found some of the 43 vignettes pleasing, but many are mediocre, and a few, such as Grey Wagtail, Wheatear and Treecreeper, do nothing for me at all.

The authors' grumbles in the prologue about crossed wires with the *British Birds* Rarities Committee and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel sound like sour grapes, while their personal views on twitching—with emphasis on the minute proportion who misbehave—are silly and irrelevant to this book; there are black sheep among nest-photographers, ringers and university researchers too.

Any birdwatcher in the home counties will want this book, and I would place it very high in a merit table of county avifaunas.

J. N. DYMOND

**Birds in Scotland. By Valerie M. Thom. T. & A. D. Poyser, Calton, 1986. 8 black-and-white plates; 143 line-drawings; 173 distribution maps. £24.00**

This book is the most important work on the birds of Scotland ever published. If it were a county avifauna, it would be a remarkable piece of work, but, covering an entire country as it does, it is quite outstanding.

In 1953 Dr Baxter and Miss Rintoul produced the two volumes of *The Birds of Scotland*; it could be said that Valerie Thom's book takes up the story since then. In fact, this book goes much farther; with the vast increase in knowledge and published information on Scottish ornithology in the last 30 years, Miss Thom has been able to go into a depth and scope that the Misses Baxter and Rintoul could scarcely have imagined.

The first section covers the avifauna and geography of Scotland in general terms before moving on to cover habitats, developments in bird study, conservation and recent changes in status and distribution. The many changes that have affected various habitats are well described and make fascinating, if sometimes depressing, reading. The good news is that the area of woodland in Scotland increased by 75% between 1947-49 and 1979-80; the bad news is that there are now 10 ha of conifers for every 1 ha of broadleaf woodland, and the ratio is widening. Upland habitats have been lost to forestry; grey geese have benefited from a change in cereal production from oats to barley; visitor-pressure has resulted in damage to mountain environments; increased grant-aid to crofters has resulted in the 'improvement' of moorlands, turning Whimbrel country into Lapwing habitat; increased awareness of conservation has resulted in 83 nature reserves of ornithological importance.

The main section of the book is devoted to the species accounts. Every species that has occurred in Scotland is covered, the accounts varying from four pages on Greylag Goose to a few lines on some extreme rarities. For the sake of completeness, it is good to see that escaped species have not been ignored, and the inclusion (with the obligatory square brackets) of old discredited records and of more-recent records that have not been accepted by the *British Birds* Rarities Committee is useful.

Distribution maps are used to show breeding areas and wintering areas; histograms demonstrate fluctuations in wildfowl numbers or seasonal variation in wader populations. The

detail of the species accounts is most impressive. Use has been made of every possible source of information, including prepublication data from the BTO/IWC Wintering Atlas and the 1984/85 Winter Shorebird Survey.

The accounts are punctuated by a mass of references, which range in scope from published accounts of rarities, to papers on identification problems, ringing reports, and even unpublished reports of seabird surveys. In fact, the book is worth having for the Bibliography alone. Many of the changes in status over the last 30 years may be due to increased awareness or simply more birdwatchers in the field, but some changes—such as the decrease in numbers of Ortolan Buntings, or the recent colonisations by Wrynecks, Snowy Owls, and Lapland Buntings—are obviously due to 'natural' reasons.

Useful Appendices list important sites, giving grid references and old county/new region changes, lists of local bird reports, island checklists and internationally important wetland areas. The appearance of the book is what we have come to expect from the Poyser stable: good layout, clear typeface, neat maps and histograms. The text is enlivened by numerous line-drawings from a pool of 12 artists under the editorship of Donald Watson, whose own work is also featured.

The author acknowledges the assistance of a great many people in preparing the book, and they are to be congratulated along with Miss Thom for producing such a masterly work.

*Birds in Scotland* is essential for anyone with an interest in Scottish birds: it is both a mine of information and food for thought and will surely stimulate interest for many years to come.

IAIN S. ROBERTSON

## News and comment

*Robin Prytherch and Mike Everett*

**Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'**

**Ivory-billed Woodpecker alive** After several rumours over the years from various parts of its former range, the latest sightings of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker *Campephilus principalis* have proved to be positive (*Daily Tel.* 6th May 1986). The last definite records of the species were in the 1950s. Then, earlier this year, two Cuban biologists claimed to have seen the woodpecker in the mountains of eastern Cuba. So, in March, the American Museum of Natural History sent Dr Lester Short and other ornithologists to the area. Dr Short eventually saw one in early April when a male pursued by a crow crossed his path. What a moment it must have been for him! He later told reporters 'I thought "My God, I've seen it!"' The bird dived into cover before he could photograph it. Dr Short and his colleagues have seen that one male and possibly two females. On receiving the confirmed reports, the Cuban Ministry of Agriculture ordered an immediate end to the forest logging activities only four miles

(6½ km) from where the woodpeckers were seen. Clearance of natural stands of forest is thought to be the cause of the virtual disappearance of the species. Subsequent reafforestation does not seem to suit it. Let us hope that more are discovered and that the forests they live in can be protected.

**Malcolm Ogilvie moves to Islay** After many years of visiting the lovely Inner Hebridean island of Islay, Dr Malcolm Ogilvie has uprooted himself from the Wildfowl Trust and his home in Gloucestershire to move permanently to Islay. There, he will be Director of the Islay Field Centre, which is funded by the Islay Natural History Trust. The Centre offers self-catering accommodation for 15, a reference room with books, a small museum and, most important, many opportunities for fieldwork. Islay's wildlife has not been so well recorded as has that of other islands off Scotland's west coast. There is a lot of interesting work to be done by



naturalists, whatever their special interest. Write for details to the Islay Field Centre, Port Charlotte, Isle of Islay, Argyll, Scotland. We wish Malcolm, his wife Carol, and the Field Centre itself, good fortune in the coming years.

**Congratulations, Iain!** That much-travelled Birdquester and Rare Man, Iain Robertson, returned to the UK from a trip to Israel on 8th April, flew directly to Thailand on 9th April to get married, arrived in Bangkok on 10th April, got married on 11th April, was back in the UK on 15th April, and had returned to his home in Shetland by 17th April. We offer Iain and his wife, Sopa, our best wishes.

**Fellowes traveller** Dr Edmund Fellowes tells us that since he won the Bird Photograph of the Year award in 1979 he has got married and now has a one-year-old daughter, Catherine. The wet summer last year was disastrous for his bird-photography, and he is in the process of building a new surgery, so this summer is likely to be no better. He and his wife have, however, spent a holiday in the Alps, and he has developed an interest in growing minute plants, as a

member of the Scottish Rock Garden club. (Two other well-known ornithologists share this alpine-plant obsession: Behaviour Notes Panellist Dr Colin Bibby and Rare Breeding Birds Panellist Robert Spencer.) Last winter, he enjoyed the presence of a wintering Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* on his local Dumfries church spires (two Church of Scotland, one Episcopal and one Roman Catholic). 'Keep on with *British Birds*,' he concludes, 'I read it right through, although I don't think I'd recognise an Oriental Skylark if I saw one.'

**Laurel Tucker** Readers will be very sad to learn that Laurel Tucker died suddenly and unexpectedly on 20th June. She was a well-known part of the Scilly and West Country scene, respected as an ornithologist, liked as a person, and recognised as a highly talented up-and-coming artist, with paintings due for publication soon in several eminent forthcoming bird books. She was second in our 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' competition in 1979, at the age of 28, and would undoubtedly have gone on to win this title if her other commitments had not prevented her from entering in subsequent years. A full obituary will appear in *British Birds* in due course. (JTRS)

## Recent reports



*Ian Dawson and Keith Allsopp*

**These are largely unchecked reports, not authenticated records**

The dates in this report refer to May unless otherwise stated.

A high-pressure ridge from the south drifted eastwards across Britain and Ireland on the first two days, giving the first hint of summer weather with the arrival of warm southerly air. The low-pressure system which replaced the anticyclone on 3rd brought in colder air, and the unsettled cool weather remained until 18th, when again two days of southerlies from high pressure close

by on the Continent raised temperatures. Atlantic depressions returned on 21st, and these unsettled westerlies continued until the end of the month.

### Waders

Yet another disappointing period both with regard to unusual species and movements: in a month of few noteworthy events, a prominent place must go to the passage of **Dotterels** *Charadrius morinellus* (plates 221 &



212 & 213. Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, Norfolk, May 1986 (Steve Young)

222), though this is perhaps only a function of increased awareness on the part of birders of their temporary lowland presence every May. Trips were widespread in the first half of the month, many passing on within 24 hours, though two groups of long-stayers were 12 near Cottenham (Cambridgeshire), and up to 16 at Thornham (Norfolk). Other double-figure counts were 23 at Hauxton (Cambridgeshire) in the second week, 18 near Liverpool (Merseyside) on 8th, 15 near Ashwell (Hertfordshire) on 11th, 28 near Goole (Humberside) on 14th, and 20 near St Andrews (Fife), also on 14th. **Temminck's Stints** *Calidris temminckii* also showed well in the southeast of England with at least 16 reported, including two together at Peterborough (Cambridgeshire) from 13th to 18th, and up to four at Minsmere (Suffolk) in the third week. The inland passage of waders was thin: there were up to five **Sanderlings** *C. alba* at Willen Lake (Buckinghamshire), and eight **Turnstones** *Arenaria interpres* together on 25th at Fisher Tarn (Cumbria). Out of place was an **Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* at Cresswell Pond (Northumberland) on 27th, and a **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* flying past St Ives (Cornwall) on 10th, whilst rarer visitors were **Black-winged Stilts** *Himantopus himantopus* flying past Beachy Head (East Sussex) on 4th, at Teesmouth (Cleveland) on 17th, and at St Abbs (Borders) on 26th. **Pectoral Sandpipers** *C. melanotos* at Cley (Norfolk) early and on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 19th, a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* at Loch of Banks (Orkney) on 21st, and **Broad-billed Sandpipers** *Limicola falcinellus* at Ferrybridge (Dorset) on 8th, Merseyside, Hull (Humberside), and Stanpit (Dorset) where there were two together mid month, and, inland, at Peterborough on 17th and 20th.

The large wading birds were poorly repre-

sented, apart from some ten **White Storks** *Ciconia ciconia*, including three together near Beal (Northumberland) on 7th, followed by several sightings of singletons in the area in the next week. Norfolk and Suffolk almost held a monopoly of **Spoonbills** *Platalea leucorodia* (plates 212 & 213), though one at Bittell Reservoir (West Midlands) was an exciting local find on 3rd. A scatter of **Cranes** *Grus grus* passed through, with four over Southend (Essex) on 16th, singles at Holme (Norfolk) and the Ouse Washes (Cambridgeshire), and in Cleveland on 4th, and on two dates in Orkney. Rare herons were represented by a **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* at Minsmere on 2nd, a **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* at Pagham (West Sussex) from 30th April into May, **Little Egrets** *Egretta garzetta* at Bedford (Bedfordshire) on 15th, Teesmouth on 18th and Balranald, North Uist (Western Isles), from 17th to at least 27th, while the only **Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* reached Loch of Tankerness (Orkney) on 23rd and 24th.

The only **Spotted Crakes** *Porzana porzana* reported were singles at Minsmere from April, and at Redcar (Cleveland) on 4th. A **Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix* on Skomer (Dyfed) on 27th April was only the second record for the island, nearly 40 years after the first.

### Seawatching

May's always the month for the **Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus* enthusiast, and so it proved again. There was a good, if unspectacular, passage past Portland (Dorset) and Dungeness (Kent) in the first couple of weeks, with a maximum of 42 east at Dungeness on 2nd. Watchers in Ireland and the Western Isles, however, were well rewarded, with totals of 566 east off Carnsore Point (Co. Wexford) between 3rd and 18th, 200 or more west off Toe Head (Co. Cork), and a total of



1,380 north past Balranald between 18th and 28th, including a staggering single-day count on 21st of 766, along with 168 **Long-tailed Skuas** *S. longicaudus* in only 25 minutes, including 82 in one flock. Further high daily totals of 'Poms' here were 241 on 18th with a further 36 Long-tails, and about 300 on 26th. The only Long-tailed Skuas elsewhere were two adults off Toe Head. Little else of interest passed the keen eyes scouring the sea: a **Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris diomedea* off Copt Point (Kent) on 28th April, **Little Shearwaters** *Puffinus assimilis* off Rame Head (Cornwall) on 5th and Portland on 26th, a **Leach's Petrel** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* past Carnsore Point on 12th, the previously mentioned Black-winged Stilt at Beachy Head, and a **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* off Bexhill (East Sussex) at the start of the month. The **Black-browed Albatross** *Diomedea melanophrys* was back at Hermaness (Shetland) (plate 215). **Roseate Terns** *Sterna dougallii* returned very late to their Irish breeding grounds, but first indications are of a welcome increase on the depressingly low numbers of the last year or two. The only **White-winged Black Tern** *Chlidonias leucop-terus* was a fine adult at Bartley Reservoir (West Midlands) on 3rd: Bill Oddie please note.

### Wildfowl

Dark-bellied **Brent Geese** *Branta bernicla* turned up off-course on Skomer (second record) and Church Wilne Reservoir (Derbyshire) on 26th April. A female **Eider** *Somateria mollissima* remained into May on Horton Gravel-pit (Berkshire), along with a female **Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis* just down the road on Wraysbury Gravel-pit (Berkshire). A flock of 1,070 Long-tailed Ducks off Anstruther (Fife) on 6th was the largest in the region for 50 years, and must have been a fine sight. Nearby, in Largo Bay (Fife), there were three drake and two duck **Surf Scoters** *Melanitta perspicillata* on 9th, and a further drake was in Scapa Flow (Orkney) on 8th. A **Ruddy Duck** *Oxyura jamaicensis* was a long way north, on North Ronaldsay, on 27th, and there were also two drakes on Kilconquhar Loch (Fife) all month. A male **King Eider** *S. spectabilis* graced Shetland (plate 217), **Red-crested Pochards** *Netta rufina* were found near Ringwood (Hampshire) on 10th and on Caldecote Lake (Buckinghamshire) mid month, while from the Nearctic came a drake **Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* to Catterick (North Yorkshire) on 30th, and a pair of

**American Wigeons** *Anas americana* to Teesmouth on 26th to at least 29th. While **Garganeys** *A. querquedula* remained scarce in their usual haunts, there was a pair at Sullom Voe (Shetland) on 5th, a drake at Hodbarrow (Cumbria) on 2nd and 3rd, another at Skinflats (Central) from 16th, and seven in Northern Ireland.

### Raptors

**Black Kites** *Milvus migrans* seem to get more numerous each year. Two late April reports were of singles near Wingham (Kent) and at Beachy Head, both on 30th; these were followed by two on Lundy (Devon), one at Rock (Northumberland) in the second week, and one over Great Holland (Essex) on 11th. On 18th, one near Loxwood (West Sussex) was seen an hour later 16 km west, over Haslemere (Surrey). The next day, one passed north over Cleadon Hills (Tyne & Wear), and Dungeness had another on 28th. Finally, one watched going to roost at Stratton (Dorset) on 30th gave a long overdue chance for many to catch up with this elusive species in Britain the following morning. A wandering **Red Kite** *M. milvus* flew from Headley (Hampshire) into Berkshire on 30th April, and another was seen near Lynton (Devon) on 13th. A **Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* appeared at Titchwell on 16th, and a week later, on 23rd, there was a bizarre



record of one walking around the gardens of a residential road in South Croydon (Surrey) for half an hour! **Marsh Harriers** *Circus aeruginosus* were well represented away from breeding areas, with three each in Ireland and Orkney, and good numbers in the north-east of England, including three hunting a rape field together on the Cleadon Hills on 12th. The only **Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus* reported was one at Portland on 9th.

### Small migrants and overshoots

Many migrants did not appear in large numbers until May, then started breeding almost

immediately, with the result that the spring song period was considerably shortened. The first three days in particular saw many arrivals, including several **Lesser White-throats** *Sylvia curruca* and **Black Redstarts** *Phoenicurus ochruros* in Orkney and at Fife Ness (Fife), a **Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* briefly at Snettisham (Norfolk), a **Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapillus* at Holme Fen (Cambridgeshire), and three **Wrynecks** *Jynx torquilla* in East Anglia. There were four **Shore Larks** *Eremophila alpestris* at Cley on 3rd, a **Lapland Bunting** *Calcarius lapponicus* near Caerphilly (Mid Glamorgan) on 4th, and a **Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* of the nominate Northern race on Sanday (Orkney) on 1st.

A **Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti* on Skomer from 25th to 29th April was the first record for the island, and its other sedentary relative, the **Dartford Warbler** *Sylvia undata*, gave Norfolk its first record for 60 years when one popped up on Blakeney Point on 17th (plates 218 & 219). A singing **Melodious Warbler** *Hippolais polyglotta* was found at Le Coupe, Jersey (Channel Islands), on 20th, and, at the other end of Britain, a **Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* appeared on Hoy (Orkney) on 12th. There were seven **Subalpine Warblers** *S. cantillans*: at Whipnade (Bedfordshire) on 7th or 8th, on Sark (Channel Islands) and at Margate (Kent) on 13th, at Spurn (Humberside) mid month (plate 214), and two on Shetland and one at Dungeness in the last week. There was a similar number of **Woodchat Shrikes** *Lanius senator*, with a total of three at Portland, and others on Lundy, Skokholm (Dyfed) on 19th, at Bempton (Humberside) around 25th and on Walney (Cumbria) on 26th; and a number of **Red-backed Shrikes** *L. collurio* appeared in the Northern Isles, as well as two at Fife Ness on 9th. A **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* reached Kirkwall (Orkney) on 11th, a **Scarlet Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* North Ronaldsay on 20th, and a **Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* on Westray (Orkney) on 22nd and 23rd was equally unusual there. There were small numbers of most of the regular scarce migrants: **Short-toed Larks** *Calandrella brachydactyla* were shared between Fair Isle (Shetland) on 5th and St Mary's (Scilly) on 6th, **Red-breasted Flycatchers** *Ficedula parva* delighted observers on North Ronaldsay on 10th, Blakeney Point and Spurn (plate 220) on 17th and Whitburn (Tyne & Wear) on 20th, the only **Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* was at Seaburn (Tyne & Wear) on 17th, a few south

coast **Ortolan Buntings** *E. hortulana* included two males at Dungeness from 3rd (plate 216), and a **Serin** *Serinus serinus* deceived listeners with its Wren-like song at Wells (Norfolk) for most of the month.

A report of a **Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata* at Milton Regis (Kent) on 26th April is intriguing. **Hoopoes** *Upupa epops* remained scarce, with a handful in southern England, a single Irish record at Annalay (Co. Down) from 17th to 27th, and a remote individual at Ardaneaskan, Loch Carron (Highland), on 28th April. A **Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus* at Filey Brigg (North Yorkshire) on 29th was the first record for this well-watched site. Away from the southeast, there were three **Golden Orioles** *Oriolus oriolus* in a small area of Borders from 14th, though eight **Bee-eaters** *Merops apiaster* and four **Alpine Swifts** *Apus melba* were all in English south coast counties, apart from one Alpine Swift at Glandore (Co. Cork) on 20th; others were on St Mary's on 3rd, on Bull Point (Devon) on 4th, and Beachy Head on 9th.



214. First-summer female Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*, Humberside, May 1986 (John Hewitt)

### Wath Ings

We apologise for *again* putting Wath Ings in North Yorkshire instead of South Yorkshire (*Brit. Birds* 79: 312); our only excuse is that our gazetteer does not include Wath Ings, but does list three places called Wath, all of which are in North Yorkshire.

### Recent rarities decisions

The records of **White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* at Cley, Norfolk, on 29th September 1985, **Needle-tailed Swift** *Hirundapus caudacutus* at Fairburn Ings, North Yorkshire, on 27th May 1985, and **Pallid Swifts** *Apus pallidus* at Strumble Head, Dyfed, and Warden Point, Kent, in November 1984 have all been accepted.





215. Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophrys* with Gannets *Sula bassana*, Shetland, May 1986 (David Tipling)

216. Male Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, Kent, May 1986 (David Tipling)



217. Male King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*, Shetland, May 1986 (David Tipling)





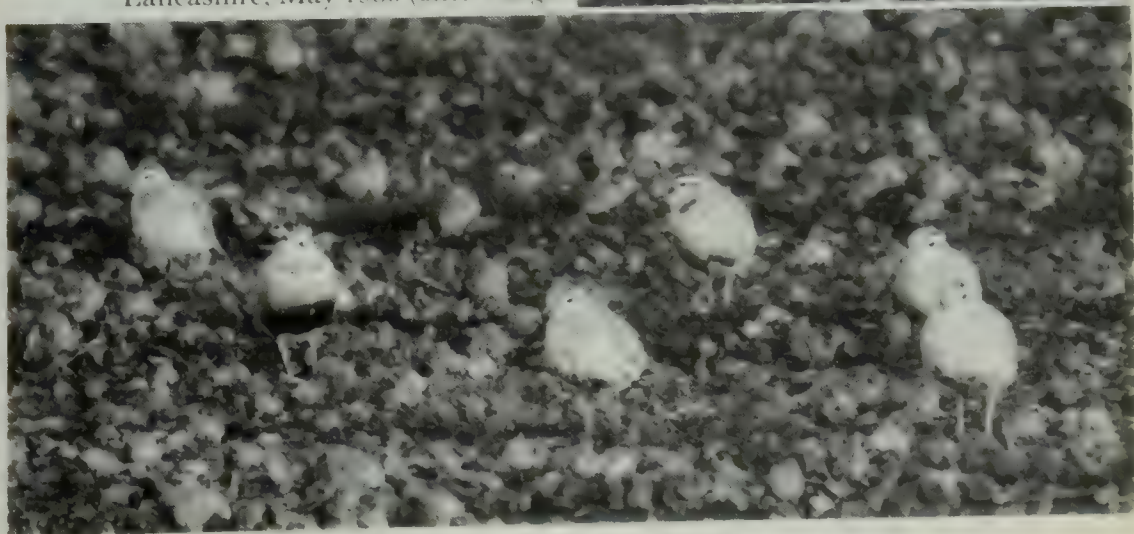
218 & 219. Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*. Norfolk, May 1986 (Steve Young)



220. First-summer male Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*. Humberside, May 1986 (John Hewitt)



221 & 222. Dotterels *Charadrius morinellus*. Lancashire, May 1986 (Steve Young)





**Latest news**

In mid July, in Norfolk, **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** and two **Temminck's Stints** at Cley, **Red-footed Falcon** at Winterton, **Serin** at Wells, and good numbers of vocal

**Quails** *Coturnix coturnix*; also **Little Egret** at Tilbury (Essex) and **Alpine Swift** at Bude (Cornwall).

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223. 'Monthly marathon' competition. Photograph number 2. Identify this species. If you succeed with ten in a row, you could win a SUNBIRD holiday to North America, Africa or South-east Asia (see rules on page 364 in July issue). Send your answer on a postcard to British Birds Editorial Office (Monthly marathon, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ) to arrive by 15th September 1986.



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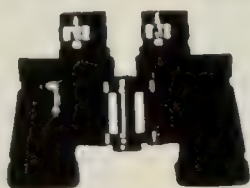
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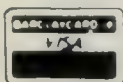
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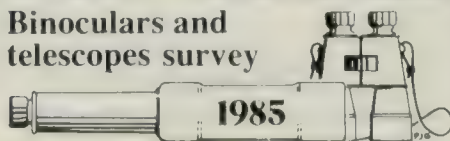
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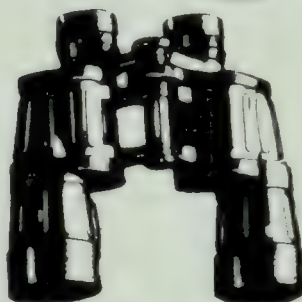
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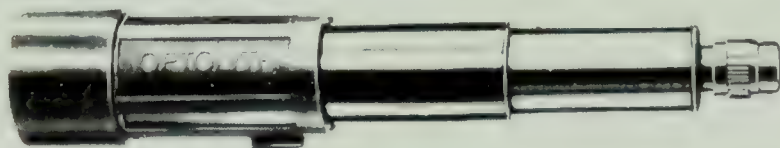


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# British Birds

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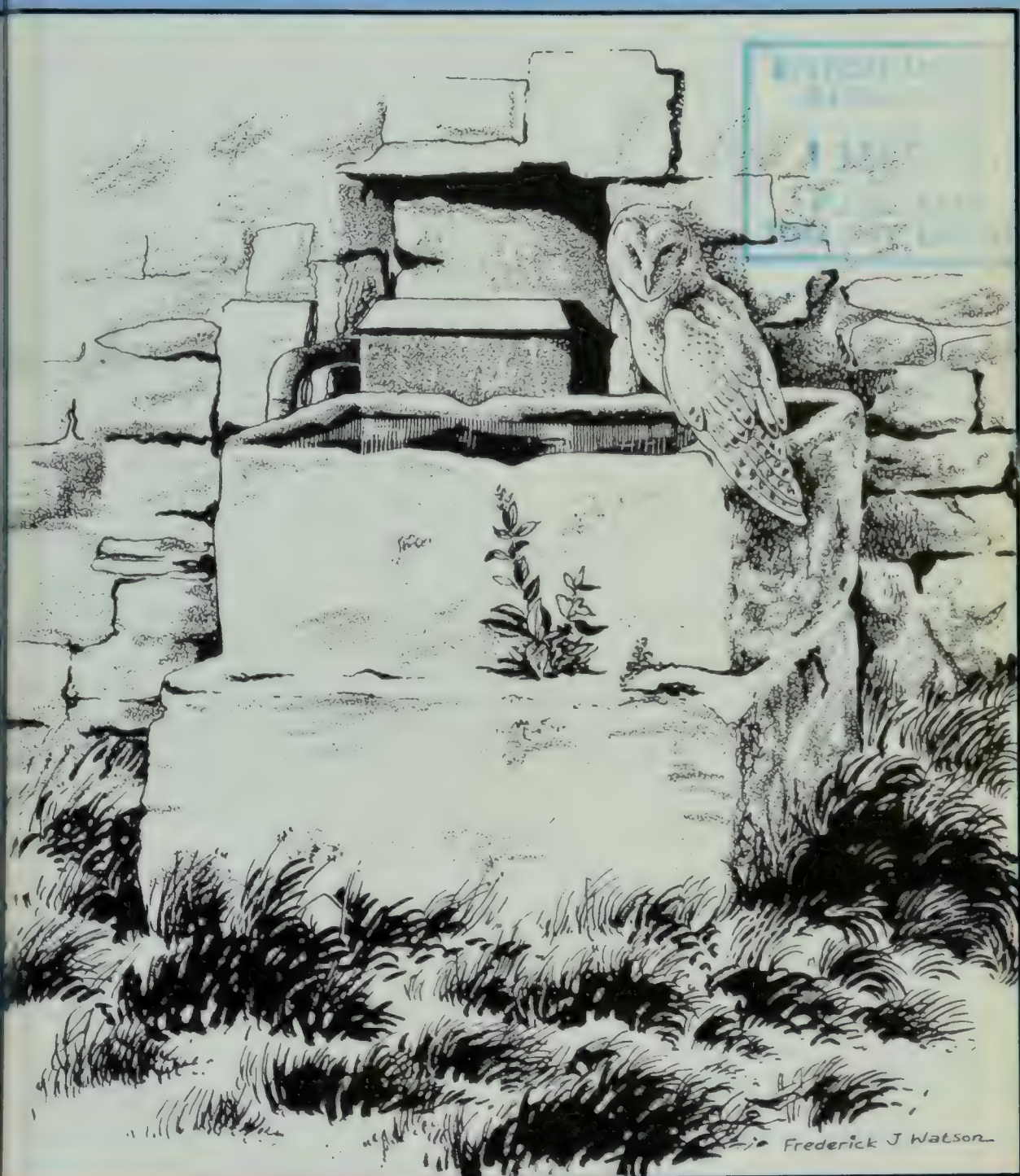
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# British Birds

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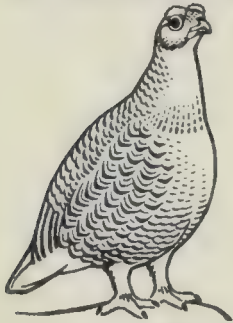
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*Publishing Manager,  
Production & Promotion*

**Dr J. T. R. Sharrock**

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## Addresses

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*Papers, notes, letters, drawings & photographs for publication* **Dr J. T. R. Sharrock**, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ

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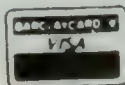
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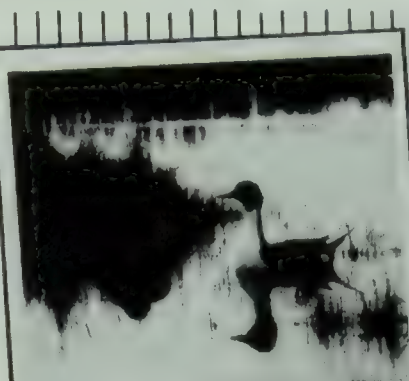
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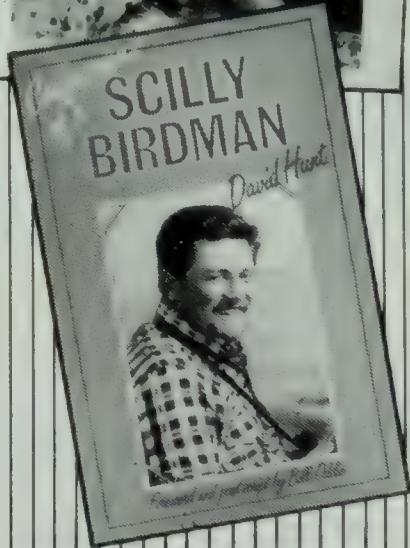
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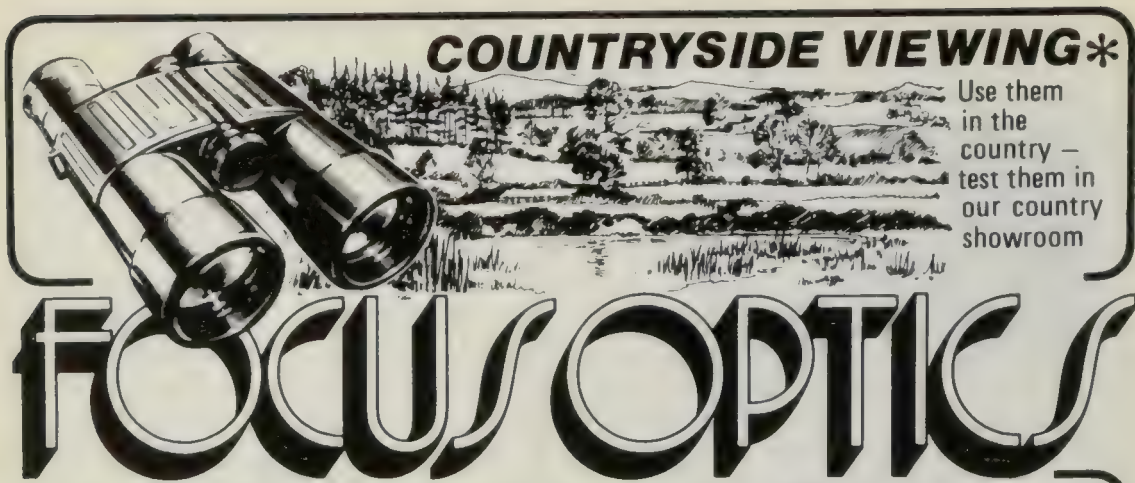
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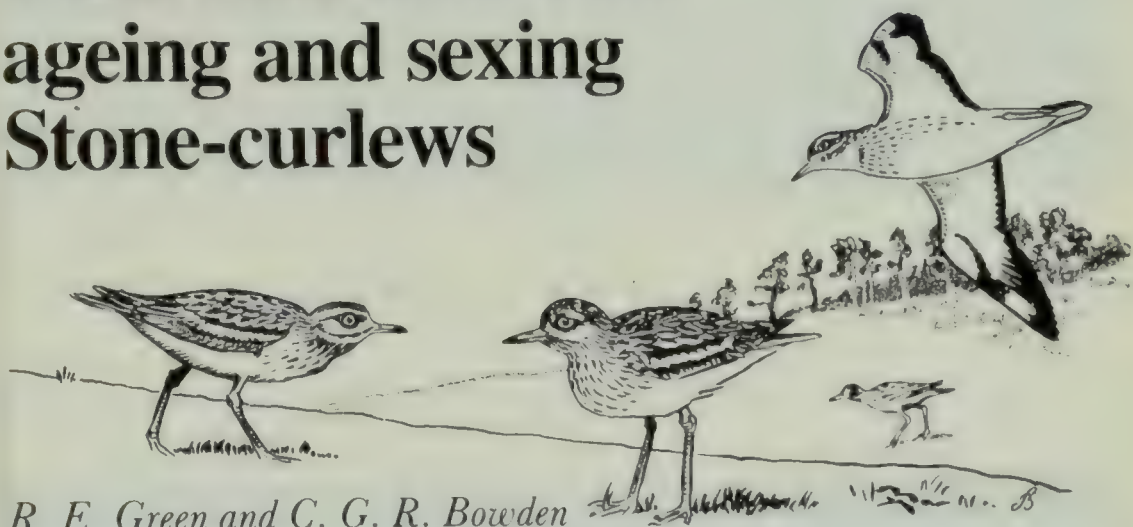
*Collins*

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# British Birds

VOLUME 79 NUMBER 9 SEPTEMBER 1986

## Field characters for ageing and sexing Stone-curlews



R. E. Green and C. G. R. Bowden

**A**lthough no reliable plumage characters have been reported for distinguishing the sexes of the Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* (Cramp & Simmons 1983; Prater, Marchant & Vuorinen 1977), we were struck by a difference between the members of mated pairs observed in spring and summer 1985 in Norfolk and Suffolk. We examined the folded wings of 29 pairs from distances of 50 to 150m with a 30 × 75 telescope and distinguished two types of wing pattern:

(A) The white band on the lesser coverts was underlined by a blackish band contrasting clearly with the grey to buff median coverts below.

(B) The white band on the lesser coverts was less distinctly underlined with a brown band, which showed poor contrast with the median coverts below.

These patterns were usually so distinct that a solitary individual could be assigned to one of the two categories without simultaneous comparison with another Stone-curlew. We found that all except one of the pairs we examined consisted of one type-A and one type-B bird. In one pair, both birds appeared to have a type-B wing pattern.

We trapped and individually colour-ringed adult Stone-curlews and took colour photographs of their wings and heads. We were subsequently able to classify the lesser/median covert pattern by telescope observation of 12 of those which we had photographed in the hand. The larger lesser coverts have a white middle portion, which forms the white wing band, and dark



tips with grey or buff fringes, except at the end of the shaft which is dark. We examined the photographs of folded wings and noted that the tips of most of these feathers were black or dark brown with narrow pale fringes on eight birds classified as type-A in the field. In four type-B birds, the tips were brown and the pale fringes were broader. On most individuals, there were some atypical coverts with brown, faded and very worn tips, which presumably had not been replaced at the last moult. The dark moustachial stripe and the dark crescent extending beneath the eye from the lores tended to be darker on type-A than on type-B birds, but this was less obvious (see plate 224).

We observed five pairs of Stone-curlews for two to four periods of at least 30 minutes one to 23 days before egg-laying. All displays were recorded and classified according to Cramp & Simmons (1983). Only type-A birds were seen 'Deep-bowing' and they were more often seen 'Scraping' than type-B birds (table 1). Type-A birds initiated all the bouts of Scraping observed, and before Scraping they frequently walked in a partial bow with the leg joints extended and the tail cocked almost vertically, with the type-B bird following (see fig. 1 of Waldon 1982). Both types 'Neck-arched' and 'Side-threw' small stones and faeces of rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* and brown hares *Lepus capensis* into the nest scrape. Courtship feeding was seen once: the type-A bird fed the type-B bird. After comparing these observations

**224.** Pair of Stone-curlews *Burhinus oedicephalus*, male at left, displaying and calling at third individual, and female at right; compare lesser coverts: male's dark-tipped and female's browner-tipped with dark shaft streaks; Norfolk, May 1974 (*Chris & Jo Knights*)





225. Head of juvenile Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*, Suffolk, August 1985 (*Rhys Green*)

**Table 1. Numbers of observation sessions (35-125 minutes' duration) involving five mated pairs of Stone-curlews *Burhinus oedicnemus* in which displays were seen**

Each entry in the table gives the number of sessions in which the type-A bird was seen to give the display, followed by the number for the type-B bird

Pair	Number of observation sessions	'Deep-bow'	'Scrape'	'Side-throw'	'Neck-arch'	Courtship feeding
1	2	2/0	2/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
2	4	4/0	4/1	2/1	2/2	0/0
3	4	4/0	4/1	2/2	1/1	0/0
4	2	2/0	2/0	0/0	1/1	1/0
5	3	3/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
TOTALS	15	15/0	13/2	4/3	4/4	1/0

with those reported in Cramp & Simmons (1983), we concluded that type-A birds were likely to be males and type-B birds females.

Our conclusion was supported by an examination of 18 specimens of adult Stone-curlews obtained in Britain which had been sexed by dissection (17 at the British Museum of Natural History and one utility-line casualty per RSPB). The tips of the largest lesser coverts were mainly dark brown or black on ten males, and brown, usually with a contrasting darker shaft streak, on eight females. The grey or buff fringes on these feathers tended to be wider on females, but there was overlap. Some atypical, worn and faded coverts were present on most specimens. There may also have been a tendency for the greyish ground colour of the median coverts to be more strongly suffused with brown on females, but this was difficult to judge on specimens and is unlikely to be useful in the field.

During June to September 1985, we examined with a telescope 31



juvenile Stone-curlews which had been colour-ringed as chicks in the same summer. The appearance of the closed wing of juveniles was very different from that of adults. The pale band on the largest lesser coverts was sandy white (rather than white) and was also broader than on adults. This pale band lacked a contrasting dark band beneath it (plate 224). The appearance of the head of juveniles was also different from that of adults, a distinction not described by Prater *et al.* (1977) nor by Cramp & Simmons (1983). The white supercilium extended in front of and behind the eye on adults, but was indistinct or, if present, did not extend in front of the eye on juveniles. On adults the ear-coverts were light brown with dark shaft streaks, while on juveniles they were white (plate 225). The appearance of the head is a useful character for distinguishing adults from juveniles when birds are lying down and the wings are concealed. An autumn post-juvenile moult occurs in which some body plumage, wing-coverts and rectrices are replaced. As a result, some first-calendar-year birds can be difficult to distinguish from adults by mid September.

We hope that field ornithologists will use these observations to establish the breeding success of Stone-curlews and to elucidate the social interactions involving three individuals which are often seen at breeding sites.

### Acknowledgment

We thank Chris and Jo Knights for supplying the transparency reproduced as plate 224.

### Summary

Plumage characters (especially colour and contrast between lesser and median coverts) are described, which appear to be sex- and age-related. These may be particularly valuable in studies of the breeding biology of Stone-curlews *Burhinus oedicephalus*.

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*Dr R. E. Green and C. G. R. Bowden, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy,  
 Bedfordshire SG19 2DL*

## Seventy-five years ago...

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'THE RETURN OF THE BITTERN TO NORFOLK. By E. L. Turner. "Quite like old times, Miss, to have Bitterns nesting and booming around." was the casual but somewhat startling greeting addressed to me by an angling friend two days after my arrival in Norfolk. I immediately "fetched up alongside" and made further inquiries.' (*Brit. Birds* 5: 90, September 1911)

# Chimney Swift: new to the Western Palearctic

*L. P. Williams*



At about 14.30 GMT on 21st October 1982, G. C. Hearl and I arrived at Porthgwarra in West Cornwall. As I stepped from his car, I glanced towards the house at the top of the valley and saw something flitting about over its roof. I managed to focus my binoculars on the movement and was astonished to see what appeared to be a large bat. Unfortunately, it was immediately lost to view. After some 20 minutes, however, GCH saw what he quickly recognised as a very small swift flying towards him. His first thoughts were that it was a Little Swift *Apus affinis*, but he then saw that it had a dark (not white) rump and what appeared to be small spines projecting from the end of its tail. He also noticed that its mode of flight was very different from the Little Swift which we had both seen in West Cornwall in spring 1981 (*Brit. Birds* 75: 512). He quickly called me over, and we then watched the bird for the next two hours. For the most part, the bird fed around the area of the houses, but eventually it moved to the nearby cliff-top, where it continued to feed before suddenly going to roost, apparently on the cliff-face. It was observed at ranges down to 10 m, flying overhead near the houses, and below us when feeding along the edge of the cliff. For the first few minutes, we were joined by another birdwatcher and his wife; he told us that he thought the bird might be a Little Swift, but GCH pointed out the dark rump and, after a few minutes, the other observer left the area. After watching the swift for some minutes, we discussed its identity. We ruled out Little Swift, Needle-tailed Swift *Hirundapus caudacutus* and runt Swift *Apus apus*, and quickly came to the conclusion that it was probably a Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica*, an identification which we independently confirmed on returning home and consulting our literature. Over the following days, it was seen by hundreds



of observers, who all agreed with this identification. Amazingly, it was joined by a second Chimney Swift from 23rd to 25th. It was last seen early on the morning of 27th October. The following description is a combination of the field notes of the two original observers.

**SIZE** Very small swift, about size of Little Swift, but with much plumper body.

**GENERAL COLORATION** Difficult to specify exactly: at distance looked black, but at closer range and in good light looked sooty-brown. Slightly darker plumage around eye, giving slight masked effect.

**BODY** All-dark, sooty-brown, with just faint lightening of colour on chin and throat, difficult to see except in good light and at favourable angle. Shape likened to short fat cigar or torpedo.

**WINGS** Long for length of body, well swept back, slightly lighter than rest of body.

**TAIL** Very small, so difficult to determine exact shape, but looked slightly rounded.

When bird close overhead, GCH pointed out what appeared to be three or four spines projecting from tail (although most authors state that these cannot be seen in the field, they are well shown in the excellent photographs taken by S. C. Hutchings: plates 228 & 229).

**BARE PARTS** Eye dark. Bill small, dark.

**CALL** None heard.

**FLIGHT** Bird's most striking character. At times, when swooping after prey, amazingly fast and agile and very bat-like. When not hunting, however, held wings bowed down, in manner of Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*. On a few occasions, hovered after prey, with tail fanned.

## Biology and taxonomy

The Chimney Swift, along with Vaux's Swift *Chaetura vauxi* and Chapman's Swift *C. chapmani*, is placed in the sub-family Chaeturinae, members of which have the tips of the tail feathers modified into hardened spines. These help the birds to cling to vertical surfaces.

From its winter quarters in Central and northeastern South America, the Chimney Swift moves slowly north from late March onwards, to occupy, by mid May, its summer home in North America east of the Great Plains. The very similar Vaux's Swift occupies the same niche in the west. Returning to the breeding colony of the previous year, pairs mate and begin nest-building. The nest, a mixture of twigs and saliva, forms a half-saucer placed above some slight projection on an inside vertical wall, as far down as 22 feet [7 m] from the top. The four or five white eggs are incubated for 14 days, and at the end of this period the nest is no longer used. The naked young are able to clamber about the walls of the chimney or other site, and are fed and fledged there. Departure for the wintering grounds commences towards the end of August, but some occur in southern Canada into early October.

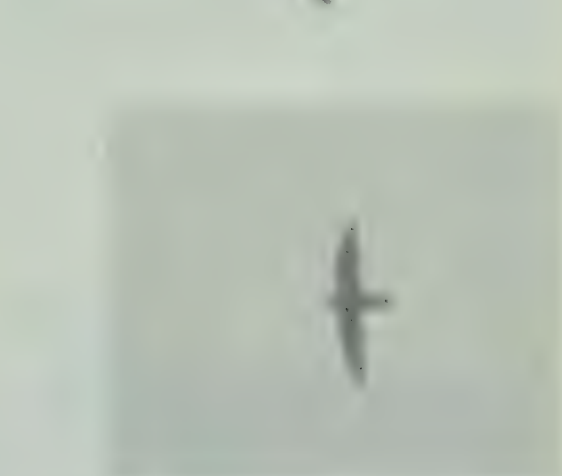
The taxonomic position of Chimney Swift is open to debate. Dr David Lack (1956) believed that Chimney, Vaux's and Chapman's Swifts should be regarded as races of one species. Dr Alexander Wetmore (1951), on the other hand, quoted evidence to show that Vaux's and Chimney Swifts are of a different evolutionary order and, taking Chapman's to be a relict, treated them as three separate species.

## Confusion species

As implied above, these three *Chaetura* swifts are closely related. Vaux's Swift, however, is smaller and is more extensively and obviously pale on the throat and upper breast. Chapman's Swift has a paler back and rump. The



226-230. Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica*,  
Cornwall, October 1982 (*S. C. Hutchings*)



only other North American swift likely to be confused with Chimney Swift is the Black Swift *Cypseloides niger*, which is larger and has a slightly forked tail. Given a good view, Chimney Swift should be easily identifiable.

### **Nearctic landbirds in Britain in 1982**

The Porthgwarra individuals have been accepted by the *British Birds* Rarities Committee and the BOU Records Committee as the first records of Chimney Swift in the Western Palearctic. It will be remembered that 1982 was the best-ever year for American landbirds in Britain. Assuming some late acceptances, a total of 30 individuals of 19 species was recorded (*Brit. Birds* 76: 476-529).



## Acknowledgments

I should like to thank S. C. Hutchings for advising on a draft of this paper and for providing the photographs; Peter Harrison for the drawing of Chimney Swift; and H. P. K. Robinson for supplying details of Chapman's Swift.

## Summary

A Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica* was recorded at Porthgwarra, Cornwall, from 21st to 27th October 1982; amazingly, it was joined by a second individual from 23rd to 25th.

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*L. P. Williams, 2 Springfield Close, Phillack, Hayle, Cornwall TR27 5AH*

# Mystery photographs

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**117** Perched conspicuously on a vantage point, and displaying strongly contrasted tri-coloured plumage (predominantly pale body plumage, but with a bold mask and strikingly black-and-white wings), last month's mystery bird (plate 211, repeated here) will have been

identified readily by most readers as one of the grey shrikes *Lanius*. But which one: Great Grey Shrike *L. excubitor* or Lesser Grey Shrike *L. minor*?

Judging the size of a lone individual can be difficult, but there are important structural clues to be noted. The bill of Lesser Grey Shrike is short but deep, producing a distinctly stubby profile which the longer, finer bill of Great Grey lacks. Even more significant are the relative lengths of wing and tail. The wing of Great Grey Shrike is relatively short: on the folded wing the third, fourth and fifth primaries are bunched closely at the tip, with three to five further primary tips discernible beyond the longest tertial. The length of the primary projection is about three-quarters that of the exposed tertials. In normal posture, the tips of the wings fall at the base of the tail and somewhat short of the tips of the uppertail-coverts; thus, the genuinely long tail is given even greater emphasis. By contrast, Lesser Grey has a comparatively short tail and long wings. The third primary is longest, with a further five to seven well-spaced primary tips visible beyond the longest tertial. The length of the primary projection is about one-and-a-quarter times that of the exposed tertials and laps the base of the tail to an extent usually exceeding the tips of the uppertail-coverts. Lesser Grey thus has a more compact, less top-heavy appearance than the rangey, ample-tailed Great Grey.

A further look at the mystery photograph, which was taken by Andrew Moon in East Sussex in July 1982, reveals bill-shape, wing-shape and wing/tail position all indicative of Lesser Grey, and this is confirmed by the very extensive black mask, which extends conspicuously across the forehead (and, indeed, reaches its greatest depth at this point). It should be noted, however, that the black on the forehead of female Lesser Grey Shrike is frequently strongly admixed with grey, while on first-year individuals the forehead may lack black entirely. Conversely, the forehead of Great Grey may in certain circumstances appear deceptively dark (see *Brit. Birds* 36: 51-53 for a notorious example). Thus, when confronted by a grey shrike—particularly an unseasonal individual—it is essential to check structure as well as plumage.

---

232. Mystery photograph 118. Identify the species. Answer next month





Great Grey Shrike shows a white supercilium, and, on the nominate race, the white wing-bar extends from the base of the primaries onto the secondaries. On Lesser Grey, the wing-bar is broader, but confined to the primaries; southern forms of Great Grey Shrike, however, may show a rather similarly shaped wing-bar: another reason for checking structural features before finalising the identification.

A. R. DEAN

## Product reports

Items included in this feature have been submitted by the manufacturers or their agents. The reviews are the personal opinions of the reviewers; they are not the result of technical tests, but are assessments made after use in the appropriate conditions (e.g. in the field). Neither *British Birds* nor the individual reviewers can accept responsibility for any adverse consequences of opinions stated, and items are accepted for review on this understanding. We aim, however, to be helpful both to our readers and to the manufacturers of goods used by birdwatchers. EDS

### Mirador 7 × 42 binoculars

At one time, *Mirador* produced rather strangely shaped (sharp-angled, rather than rounded) 8 × 40 and 10 × 40 binoculars with a large, distinctive, silver-coloured focusing wheel. Those were superb models, and why *Mirador* ever stopped manufacturing them I (and several retailers with whom I have spoken) will never understand. Subsequent 'improved designs' were greatly inferior for ornithological use. Now there is this traditionally shaped Mirador 7 × 42 (one of a range of six sizes—6 × 32, 8 × 32, 7 × 42, 8 × 42 and 10 × 42—in two finishes—leatherette and black gripfast rubberised covering). One excellent feature is the very wide focusing wheel. With a good field of view, clear to the edges, and focusing down to about six metres, this light (622-g) binocular seems ideal for general ornithological use, particularly by beginners and those who require a lightweight easy-to-use binocular. The price (under £100) makes it very good value for money. Optically and in certain structural respects it is, of course, not comparable with the elite range of models costing more than three times as much, but is more than a match for its rivals in this middle price range (and better than several costing a good deal more). It comes with a useful sandwich-sized box-like case. The plastic rainguard, however, is inadequate, since it fits over the eye-pieces only when the binocular is closed up with the eye-pieces close together (this would probably not matter for a race-goer, but a birdwatcher wants to be able to remove the rainguard with a flip and have the binoculars ready for instant use). Rubberised eye-pieces are supplied, but are rather longer than necessary (reducing the field of view for non-spectacle-wearers). A good point, however, is the long rubberised end to each objective lens, which seems likely to be a good protection against the inevitable accidental knocks.

It is a pleasure to be able to recommend a binocular with good performance and a number of good features which does not cost a fortune.

J. T. R. SHARROCK

# Notes



**Buzzards talon-grappling and tumbling to ground** On 2nd September 1981, over a large, flat hay-stubble field near Fontenilles, France, at a range of about 100 m, I saw two Buzzards *Buteo buteo* fly at each other and flick-roll into a talon-grapple to form a cruciform shape at a height of 20 m. They rapidly cartwheeled to the ground, without any apparent attempt to release their grip on one another. The impact into the 15-cm hay stubble was audible to me. The Buzzards remained still at the point of impact for one minute, then flew off in different directions, both appearing unharmed.

A. HEYWOOD

*Normandie Cottage, Fidges Lane, Eastcombe, near Stroud, Gloucestershire*

*BWP* states that, in such encounters between Buzzards, both individuals sometimes tumble down, but 'rarely with talons interlocked', and that these incidents are the likely source of reported Mutual-cartwheeling displays by presumed pairs. Ebs

**Food-seeking Buzzard following combine-harvester** On 22nd August 1981, at Drift, Penzance, Cornwall, a combine-harvester moving slowly forwards, and causing much noise, was being followed by a Buzzard *Buteo buteo* which hovered at 4-5m either just above or a little behind it. To maintain its position, the Buzzard held its wings well above its body and rotated them, but a strong breeze greatly facilitated the behaviour. It sporadically stooped to pick up edible items, feeding on these as it rested on the ground. Its feeding periods varied considerably, but the raptor always pursued the harvester and resumed its aerial watch; it continued this behaviour for 1½ hours, until all the corn had been cut. Neither Tubbs (1974, *The Buzzard*) nor *BWP* mentions this species using this feeding strategy.

BERNARD KING

*Gull Cry, 9 Park Road, Newlyn, Penzance, Cornwall*

**Buzzards following and alighting on working plough** Carnaquidden Farm, Gulval, Penzance, Cornwall, which rises to 244 m (800 feet), is thought to be the most elevated worked farmland in the county. All species of birds, and most other animals, have been protected there for many years, in consequence of which some are particularly tame. As part of the spring re-seeding programme in late March 1980, I was ploughing a small field near some little-used barns. Because the ground is laden with granite, and a fixed-beam plough was being used, the job was quite slow. It is not uncommon anywhere to have gulls *Larus* of various kinds ride on the mole-boards of the plough and pick worms and grubs off the furrows as they pass by. On this occasion, however, two adult and two juvenile Buzzards *Buteo buteo* alighted in the field, frightening off any gulls present. Although the adults were obviously more nervous, the young Buzzards—with the fearlessness of youth—followed the plough, venturing nearer and nearer until eventually they dared to sit on the rear mole-board. Buzzards have often been present in the fields during ploughing, but never in my experience have any been so bold as this.

MARK HAMPDEN SMITH

*Carnaquidden Farm, Gulval, Penzance, Cornwall*



**Hen Harrier and Merlin hunting together** Previous notes on harriers *Circus* and small falcons *Falco* hunting together (*Brit. Birds* 75: 286-287; 77: 72-73, 481-482) prompt the following. On 30th November 1982, at Spurn, North Humberside, we saw a 'ringtail' Hen Harrier *C. cyaneus*, probably a first-winter male, appear over a large stubble field; simultaneously, a male Merlin *F. columbarius* flew low past it. As the harrier began to hunt, the Merlin started a fast low circuit of the field edge in front of it, then turned to fly very low over the harrier. As the latter turned to head north, the falcon made a similar dashing circuit to the north and again turned to head straight for the harrier, this time passing beneath it. The harrier flew off, followed by the Merlin; it showed no reaction to the falcon's presence. Neither raptor was seen to make a pass at any prey. The Merlin presumably hoped to pick off any birds flushed by the harrier. In our experience, harriers rarely pursue these, but concentrate on birds that have 'frozen'. The harrier could, therefore, also have benefited, since more birds were likely to freeze owing to the Merlin's behaviour.

J. CUDWORTH and C. MASSINGHAM  
17a Prospect Road, Ossett, West Yorkshire WF5 8AE

**Hen Harrier and Peregrine hunting 'in tandem'** Association of hunting Peregrines *Falco peregrinus* and Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* (*Brit. Birds* 77: 481-482) is normal on Ruabon Moors, Clwyd. Since 1981, the gamekeeper, D. Taylor, and I have seen eight cases of presumed 'tandem hunting' by these raptors, and DT saw this behaviour 'fairly often' in the previous six years. In most cases, the Peregrine 'waited on' behind and well above the harrier, at 15-45 m, either boring slowly into the wind or gyrating in tight circles. On 6th February 1983, a Peregrine attacked a Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus* flushed by a harrier. On 12th February 1984, a female harrier killed a grouse over which a Peregrine had just flown, the latter having advanced in a series of oblique, low-level dives with the harrier following about 6 m above it; the harrier turned suddenly, and pounced on the squatting grouse.

This tandem hunting clearly benefits both predators: avian prey flies before a hunting harrier, which kills mainly on the ground, while it crouches beneath a hunting Peregrine, which is an aerial killer.

I have watched the two species circling together and engaging in aerial 'play' high above the moors. This may be a mechanism for reducing aggression between these two hunters of the same prey. That they may even 'share' carcasses was suggested by an observation by DT of a ringtail harrier standing 4 m from and watching a Peregrine feeding on a newly killed Red Grouse.

Only two of the eight cases involved adult male harriers, and only two occurred within the species' breeding seasons (late March to August). Both raptors are on the moors all year, but grey harrier males only in the breeding season.

JOHN LAWTON ROBERTS  
Belmont, Berwyn, Llangollen, Clwyd LL20 8AL

**Kestrel exploiting hunting activity of weasels** On 28th March 1984, near Yarm, Cleveland, while watching a female Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* still-hunting from a roadside telegraph pole, I noticed two weasels *Mustela nivalis* hunting in the rough grass beneath her. The falcon made no attempt to take either animal, even though they were exposed while crossing the road. Twice she was disturbed by traffic and joggers, but each time returned to the same perch. When a small mammal tried to cross the road to escape the weasels, the raptor easily caught it. When still-hunting, a Kestrel's view of the terrain cannot be so detailed as when it is hovering. Perhaps it anticipates prey being less secretive when fleeing a ground predator, and therefore it does not need to scrutinise so intensely. The weather was mild, sunny and windless; in these conditions, hovering may have been more energy-consuming than still-hunting and exploiting the activities of the weasels.

A. G. McLEE

3 The Green, Kirklevington, Yarm, Cleveland

**Kestrel exploiting hunting strategy of Merlin** Some years ago, near Yarm, Cleveland, I watched a male Merlin *Falco columbarius* fly over a small flock of Skylarks *Alauda arvensis*. Having not flushed any, it continued its flight over the sea wall. From nowhere came a Kestrel *F. tinnunculus*, which pounced on a grounded lark and made off with it. Once the larks had adopted a 'sit-tight policy', the Kestrel was able to exploit the situation, being better adapted to air-to-ground tactics.

A. G. McLEE

3 The Green, Kirklevington, Yarm, Cleveland

We have also received details from R. Q. Skeen, on Merlin and Kestrel hunting together, and from Howard Ray, on Merlins apparently hunting in association with moving cars. We have, over the last four years, given a wide airing to the topic of co-operative hunting and hunting associations of raptors. This subject is, therefore, now closed. EDS

**Kestrel reacting to butterfly** In the early afternoon of 24th April 1984, at Stodmarsh, Kent, I saw what I presumed by its size, dark colour and the time of year to be a peacock butterfly *Inachis io* flying near a Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* hovering about 50m above the reeds. The butterfly appeared to be investigating the Kestrel, but then flew directly at it; the raptor reacted by taking evasive action, after which the two separated.

B. D. MORETON

St Johns, Burleigh Road, Charing, Ashford, Kent TN27 0JB

**Kestrel regularly catching bats** During December 1983 and January and February 1984, at Rufa's, Gezira Province, Sudan, a female Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* was observed catching and killing small bats. The pattern of behaviour was always the same. In late afternoon, the Kestrel would appear over the market, perhaps 30 m up, soaring and hovering; at sunset, bats left from the eaves of shops, usually in groups of 20-60. A quick stoop into the flock and a bat was usually caught, and taken to a tree and eaten. If the raptor made its kill early, it would be back hunting within ten minutes;



on several occasions, it caught a second bat. This behaviour was observed on every evening. I can find no record of a Kestrel hunting bats so regularly and successfully, although the African Grey Kestrel *F. ardosiaecus*, which also occurs in the area, certainly does so.

P. TOUT

1 Ousden Drive, Cheshunt, Hertfordshire EN8 9RL

**Identification problems with immature Citrine Wagtails** This note appears on pages 464-468.

**Reed Warbler singing in oil-seed rape field** In 1974, P. F. Bonham and I reported two single Sedge Warblers *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* singing persistently from fields of oil-seed rape *Brassica napus* near Great Barford and near Bletsoe, both in Bedfordshire (*Brit. Birds* 67: 389-390).

On 7th June 1986, whilst engaged in my Common Birds Census, at Old Warden, Bedfordshire, I came across a Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus* singing from about 50 m within a 11.7-ha field of oil-seed rape. I attracted the bird to me by 'pishing', but did not enter the crop to search for a nest (in any case, it may well have been an unmated male). Breeding Reed Warblers are to be found in two reedbeds of *Phragmites australis* 500 m and 2.2 km from this site.

The brilliant yellow fields of flowering oil-seed rape are a relatively new feature of the British countryside. The area devoted to this crop has increased in the United Kingdom from 4,000 ha in 1970 to 7,000 ha in 1972, 14,000 ha in 1973, 25,000 ha in 1974 and, the latest available information, 296,000 ha in 1985. Thus, there is now over seventy times more oil-seed rape grown in the UK than there was 15 years ago.

In 1974, PFB and I wrote 'It will be interesting to see whether . . . other species colonise this expanding habitat.' Records of these or other species singing from or nesting deep within oil-seed rape fields (not merely near bordering hedges) will be welcomed for possible summary in *British Birds*.

I am most grateful to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, for providing me with the statistics concerning areas of oil-seed rape grown in the United Kingdom.

J. T. R. SHARROCK

Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ

**Northern Parula in Scilly** I suppose every birder dreams of finding a major rarity in the Isles of Scilly. This must be even more so if, during that special October period when the cream of British birders are present, the bird discovered is one which the majority have not seen before in Britain.

On 1st October 1983, a boatload of us crossed to Tresco to look for a reported Scarlet Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*. It was not relocated, so I strolled to the Borough Farm area southeast of Old Grimsby, where an Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* had been observed previously. T. J. Wilson was just in front of me. He indicated that there were several warblers in the hedgerow. I raised my binoculars and latched on to a small

warbler, which I immediately identified as a Northern Parula *Parula americana*. I amazed myself by only casually uttering the words 'I've got a Parula here'. Then the penny dropped, and I jumped in the air, clenched fist raised above my head, and screamed 'Yeah!'

I could hardly hold my binoculars steady as my blood pressure and excitement increased. After watching the bird for a few minutes, as it darted in and out of the hedge, to convince myself that my initial identification was correct, I then raced around to the farmer and told him to expect 'one or two' birders to arrive, since he had yet another rare bird on his land.

I then ran around the north end of the Great Pool spreading the good news. I burst into the local tavern and screamed at all the birders who were supping merrily and conversing expectantly. A moment's silence was followed by pandemonium as everyone dived out of the pub, grabbing their tripods and 'scopes on the way.

Back at the hedgerow, the scene was incredible: where there had before been a couple of birders, there were now masses, but all behaving impeccably as they caught glimpses of this avian jewel. The farmer was also on good terms and lost no time in collecting donations.

The following details of the bird were noted:

**GENERAL IMPRESSION** Small warbler-like bird recalling Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*. Short dark bill, dark wings with double white wing-bars, yellow throat and breast, and white belly to undertail-coverts.

**BARE PARTS** Legs appeared dark. Bill: lower mandible pale, upper mandible dark. Eyes appeared dark.

**HEAD** Blue-grey except for yellow chin and throat. Broken white eye-ring. Slightly fainter blue-grey supercilium. Faint darker blue-grey stripe through eye. Whitish supraloral spot.

**UPPERPARTS** Back 'Firecrest'-green, with blue-grey border. Rump blue-grey. Wings dark; tertials with whitish fringes; median and greater coverts tipped whitish, forming double white wing-bars.

**UNDERPARTS** Chin, throat and breast bright yellow; sides of breast and front part of flanks blue-grey, continuous with nape. Belly to undertail-coverts whitish. Tail relatively short and dark.



Northern Parula *Parula americana*, Scilly.  
October 1983 (Richard Millington)

On returning to St Mary's, the main island, it was obvious that the boatmen were exuberant. It had been a good day's business. And all this occurred on my first-ever visit to the magical Isles of Scilly.

This Northern Parula was the fourth record in Britain and Ireland, the three previous ones being in three successive years during 1966-68: in Scilly in October 1966 (*Brit. Birds* 63: 149-151), in Cornwall in November 1967 (*Brit. Birds* 70: 263-264), and in Dorset in October 1968 (*Brit. Birds* 62: 486). A fifth was found nine days later, on St Agnes, Isles of Scilly (see below).

I should like to thank Richard Millington for allowing the inclusion of his drawing of this bird with my note.

ROBIN CHITTENDEN

12 Checker Street, King's Lynn, Norfolk



**Northern Parula in Scilly** At 13.00 GMT on 10th October 1983, whilst walking down from the post office towards the quay on St Agnes, Isles of Scilly, my wife saw what she took to be a Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus* disappearing into an evergreen hedge a few yards from her, at Covean Cottage. After a few seconds, the bird reappeared on the edge of the hedge and she immediately brought my attention to it. For a while we were rendered speechless by this little gem of a bird. We considered it to be a Northern Parula *Parula americana*, and after about half a minute I attracted the attention of Richard Burness and John Ridley, who were farther up the road. We all four watched the bird at close range and in perfect light for a further two minutes as it fed actively from the foliage. It then disappeared into the hedge and the four of us consulted field guides which confirmed our initial identification. Another half dozen birders promptly arrived on the scene and, after a nerve-racking five-minute wait, the bird reappeared in the same place for a further two minutes, after which time it disappeared, not to be seen again that day. It was relocated the following day, however, and was seen by many observers during the subsequent two days up to 13th October. I made the following notes immediately after the initial observation:

**UPPERPARTS** Forehead, crown, nape, lores, ear-coverts, scapulars, rump, uppertail-coverts and tail bright slaty-blue. Mantle bright greenish yellow, well demarcated from nape, rump and scapulars. Narrow whitish eye-ring.

**UNDERPARTS** Chin, throat and upper breast bright yellow. Rest of underparts pure white, though undertail-coverts and undertail not seen well. (Subsequent observations revealed faint rusty-red striations across breast, producing weakly defined gorget, definition of which varied with viewing angle and light conditions.)

**WINGS** Bright slaty-blue, with fairly broad white tips to greater and median coverts giving distinct double wing bar.

**BARE PARTS** Bill shortish, thin, weak-looking, dark in colour, though extreme base paler (perhaps pinkish). Eye black. Legs dark.

**SIZE** As Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, though decidedly plumper, and looking shorter tailed.

**BEHAVIOUR** Not unlike Blue Tit: clinging to small branches, even upside down at times, though seemed more sluggish, with more-deliberate movements.

This record was accepted as the fifth for Britain and Ireland and was the middle one of three in 1983, the first of these also occurring in Scilly, some nine days earlier; the sixth record was a first-winter male at Firkeel, Co. Cork, during 19th-24th October (*Irish Birds* 3: 102-103). T. GRAVETT

*Ty Corbri, Llanllechid, Bethesda, Gwynedd*

**Common Yellowthroat in Scilly** We discovered the bird at 10.15 GMT on 2nd October 1984, in a small apple tree at the foot of Samson Hill on Bryher, Isles of Scilly. The site, on the east side of the hill, was sheltered from the fresh northerly wind; the light was excellent. PCJS drew attention to the bird some 20m away in the tree. We were struck by the brightness of the yellow on its throat and also noted a dark smudge on the ear-coverts, its uniform greeny brown upperparts, and its whitish belly. We watched it on and off for about 10 minutes as it subsequently moved in and out of the bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, at one stage within 7m, but later farther away

up the hill, where we lost sight of it. We remained in the area for nearly three hours, but could not relocate the bird. We had no idea what it was until the evening, when we consulted a number of field guides and came to the conclusion that we had found a male Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*. The limited views allowed only the most obvious features to be noted, but we obtained the following details:

**SIZE** Like slightly shorter and dumpier Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*.

**HEAD** Crown and nape greeny brown; impression of distinct division between cap and face; obvious dark smudge showing behind and slightly below eye.

**UPPERPARTS** Crown, nape, neck, back, rump and tail almost uniformly green-brown, the rump and uppertail appearing somewhat greener when seen from behind; no sign of wingbars or streaking.

**UNDERPARTS** Throat and upper breast brilliant yellow, appearing to fade fairly sharply to off-white on lower breast and belly. Vent and undertail-coverts washed yellow.

**BEHAVIOUR** Active, reminiscent of *Sylvia* warbler, rarely emerging from cover and then only briefly; fed on invertebrates in and on vegetation, moving through rather than flying over it.

**VOICE** Quiet 'tic', uttered at 5 to 10 second intervals.



233. Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*, Scilly, October 1984 (Roger Tidman)

The following day, the bird was relocated and observed by approximately 150 people. It then 'went missing' for a few days, but turned up again the following week and was seen until at least 17th October. One photograph has already been published (*Brit. Birds* 78: 582, plate 285) and another appears as plate 233.

This was the third record of Common Yellowthroat in Britain and Ireland. The first was on Lundy, Devon, on 4th November 1954 (*Brit. Birds* 48: 145-147) and the second on Fetlar, Shetland, during 7th-11th June 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 582-583, plates 280 & 286). All three were males.

S. KOŁODZIEJSKI and P. C. J. SKINNER  
37 Millmark Grove, London SE14 6RL



# Letters

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**Caution needed in Morocco** With reference to the note in March 1986 (*Brit. Birds* 79: 142) about Dr Stephanie Tyler being robbed at Agadir, I have a further cautionary tale from this part of Morocco. On 5th May 1986, while birdwatching on the Sous Estuary near Agadir Airport, two friends and I were attacked and robbed at knifepoint. I was stabbed in the arm and my telescope and pocket camera stolen, but fortunately not my binoculars (any decent birder would fight to the death to defend his Zeiss 10×40s!). I strongly advise any birdwatcher intending to visit this particular site to keep away unless with a large group, as the area is becoming quite notorious as a haunt of thieves and other undesirables who prey on tourists. (We heard of at least three other incidents recently involving robbery at knifepoint, and the police are of little help in these matters.) Unfortunately we did not learn until too late of the personal dangers of this area, but others should be warned.

CHARLES E. RICHARDS

62 Harbour View Road, Portland, Dorset DT5 1EP

We appreciate that such events can occur anywhere (including Britain), but publish this letter to remind birdwatchers to be circumspect when planning to visit remote or secluded areas. EDS

**Bird-photography in Tunisia** Having returned from a trip to Tunisia, we should like to advise future birders and naturalists planning excursions to this area that, according to Tunisian laws, it is forbidden to photograph Tunisian birds and animals unless in possession of a written permit obtained from Ministère de l'Agriculture, Direction des Forêts, 30 rue Alain Savary, Tunis, Tunisia.

This was news for us and almost resulted in our arrest, and confiscation of our photo-equipment, binoculars, telescopes, and so on, not to mention our films.

H. HARRESTRUP ANDERSEN and PEDER E. JACOBSEN

St Emmerske, 6270 Toender, Denmark

We were informed by the Tunisian Embassy in London that there are 'No restrictions on photographing birds and wildlife' in Tunisia, but that is not the case, according to the Ministère de l'Agriculture in Tunis. We strongly advise all visiting birdwatchers (not just bird-photographers) to obtain written authorisation prior to their departure. EDS

**Cleaning-up gannetries** Discarded synthetic fishing lines and nets have fairly recently become a menace to nesting Gannets *Sula bassana*. The proportion of nests containing netting and/or line exceeds 50% at many colonies (e.g. Bass Rock, Bempton, Grassholm, Fair Isle, Les Etacs). The sight of adults or young fatally entangled is clearly distressing, and it would obviously be preferable if netting and line were not discarded at sea in the first place.

I fully appreciate that the recent cleaning-up operations to remove synthetic materials from gannetries are intended to reduce these distressing deaths. I am concerned, however, that this action may not have the desired effect and, before it becomes too fashionable, two questions should be answered. First, do Gannets breed in the season following the removal of their nests? Secondly, do they compensate for the loss by bringing in even more nest material and thereby perhaps increase the risk to themselves and their chick? These questions could be answered by direct observations and would seem a worthwhile project for someone.

SARAH WANLESS

*Pittenkerrie Cottage, Glassel, Banchory, Kincardineshire AB34DD*

**Which greenish warblers show wing-bars?** A. R. Dean's real effort to blow away 30 years of clouds over the British status and identification of the Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* (*Brit. Birds* 78: 437-451) leaves this old hand still wary of the subjects. I do not blame the Rarities Committee for its reluctance to tangle openly with races, and I have no quarrel with the late Ken Williamson's views on *Phylloscopus*. They are, however, not the only ones, and a slightly wider reading of the systematic literature (e.g. Vaurie 1959, BOU 1971) could have prevented a particularly unfortunate compression of the British races of the Chiffchaff *P. collybita* into only three. After 32 autumns since my Fair Isle baptism, 24 since my first attempt at a Greenish, and at least 14 with every odd Chiffchaff noted (and often still sketched), I see in their British movements Chiffchaffs of five main types. These I assign to (1) a dark southern race (claimed by others in spring and summer, but also apparently reaching as far north as Flamborough Head, Humberside, as a late autumn 'reversed' migrant), (2) nominate *collybita*, (3) *abietinus*, (4) *fulvescens* (taken by Vaurie to be responsible for most, if not all British claims of *tristis*), and (5) *tristis* (rarest of all, starting as it does beyond the Yenesei). Among these forms, my notes of 'wing-shades'—paler, more yellowish marks on the tips of the greater coverts—are infrequent up to and including *abietinus*, and I am not convinced that southwest, west and northwest European Chiffchaffs show 'wing-bars'. Where Dean's long, curved, but no brighter than 'grey-white' wing-bars do occur frequently is on *fulvescens* and *tristis*, and I am therefore sure that both west, central and east Siberian Chiffchaffs commonly wear them in their *first autumn* (I stress the season, because I have no note of wing-bars on Chiffchaffs in two Kenyan winters, or passing through four Middle East springs). Of course, a morphologically complex species such as the Chiffchaff will provide exceptions to rules, but, unless the Rarities Committee can show more certain evidence of wing-bars on *abietinus*, I shall continue to beware grey-toned, wing-barred *fulvescens* most on the way to Greenish. This last race is a nasty pitfall—especially when it is not stood to attention by reviewers—because its upperparts can be washed green and olive, while its underparts are typically clean and contrastingly white behind a dull upper breast. Hence some exaggerated wing-bars and, because it is the *least brown* race of the Chiffchaff, the greatest chance of a mistake.



My next worry is the absence from the paper of the east Siberian race *yakutensis* of the Willow Warbler *P. trochilus*. It has not been proved to reach Britain, but I have watched two dull, grey birds at Flamborough in the classic 'tristis' time-slot that had me all over the genus until they called and obligingly sang. One showed a faint, grey-white bar on its wing, and could easily have been logged as an aberrant, pale-legged 'northern' Chiffchaff, or a Greenish, or an Arctic *P. borealis*. Mention of the last species also brings in tow another of its races ignored in the paper: east of Lake Baikal, there lurks the small, less olive, greener or greyer *transbaicalicus*, with a wing-length range widely overlapping that of Greenish. Along with the Two-barred Greenish Warbler *P. plumbeitarsus*, it may never get here, but it could—and we should not forget either. My last worry concerns the Green Warbler *P. nitidus*. It is rather confidently discussed by Dean. What, then, am I to make of J. S. M. Albrecht's much more cautious comments (*Sandgrouse* 6: 69-75)? I have never seen Green, but I sense that we are nowhere near its 'last word'.

I have one general complaint, but I shall try to express it constructively. May I appeal to new review authors to uphold the *Handbook* tradition of breathing more life into birds than that conveyed by plumage colours, structures and calls. There must be more in the rarity files, for both specific actions and general behaviour do differ among the members of amorphous genera. All Chiffchaffs (whatever their race) frequently drop and wag their tails and are even called 'tail-wagger' in India; at least some Greenish exhibit nervous wing- and tail-feather flicking, like the Dusky Warbler *P. fuscatus*; and, while the Arctic does often look sturdy and rather short-tailed, it also moves through foliage with bouts of speed and confidence greater than any congener that I know. Such notes all help to describe *the whole bird* and reduce the risk of colour tone and biometric *minutiae* obscuring it.

Finally, I have a request. Before much longer, I shall be trying to get the greenish warblers, with and without wing-bars, right for *BWP* vol. 6; I should be happy to read anyone's views upon them. D. I. M. WALLACE  
*Elton House, Elton Grange, Newborough, Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire*

A. R. Dean's reply to D. I. M. Wallace appears below. EDS

It is rather presumptuous of D. I. M. Wallace to assume that the Rarities Committee is unaware of the considerations he mentions. In fact, most of the issues have been the subject of considerable debate, both within the Committee and in international correspondence. The published paper was inevitably a distillation (and hopefully a simplification) of a complex body of information, and quite intentionally concentrated on those factors deemed most relevant to the situation in Britain. Hence, my paper 'deals primarily with the principal characters by which Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* and "northern" Chiffchaffs *P. collybita abietinus/tristis* may be distinguished and then, *more briefly*, describes the salient characters of other confusion species.' It was never within its brief to deal with, for example, contentious subspecies of Arctic Warbler *P. borealis* (see Williamson 1974).

It may, however, reassure Mr Wallace to learn that I have myself, in Rarities Committee files, nominated *P. trochilus yakutensis* as a contender for the British list, and noted its potential confusion with other *Phylloscopus* species (though hardly with fresh-plumaged Greenish). Equally, in correspondence with fellow members of the Rarities Committee and international referees, I have noted that the 'grey-and-white' Chiffchaffs which arrive in Britain in late autumn appear to show characters close to the type previously known as '*fulvescens*'. In following Williamson, who did not regard '*fulvescens*' as a valid race (nor was it accepted by Ticehurst, 1938), I have, therefore, encompassed this form within my treatment of *tristis*; it is precisely for this reason that I referred to different 'populations' in the discussion of *tristis* on page 441. I must also point out that nowhere have I speculated on the number of races which reach Britain, nor have I suggested that wing-bars are associated with other than 'northern' forms.

Mr Wallace is not alone in perceiving the diversity of plumage displayed by late autumn Chiffchaffs in Britain. There is annual discussion of this phenomenon in places such as the Isles of Scilly. Indeed, in the initial draft of my text, I attempted a classification of types (based on olive, brown and grey morphs), but, in consultation with international referees, it proved impossible to relate these precisely to subspecies. Lars Svensson, in particular, emphasised the clinal nature of Chiffchaff plumages, and stressed the dangers of what he aptly termed 'wishful grouping'. Hence, it does not seem realistic to draw precise lines between *abietinus*, '*fulvescens*', and *tristis*, nor to ascribe wing-bars to one side of a line between the first two. It does seem, however, that the incidence of wing-bars is greater towards the *tristis* end of the cline, and this was clearly indicated in table 2.

A careful reader will surely have noted the considerable caveats in my treatment of Green Warbler *P. nitidus* (page 445, lines 31-33, and table 2, 'Upperparts' and 'Underparts'), a caution I repeated in the 'Report on rare birds' for 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 576)? It should be noted, however, that J. S. M. Albrecht's useful observations related to adults in summer, a time when all members of the 'Greenish' group are at their least distinctive. As the individual on St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, in 1983 confirmed, first-winter Green Warbler *may* be relatively distinctive: the first paragraph of my Green Warbler account concluded '*Well-marked* individuals, however, are not difficult to identify in the field.' It hardly needs saying that the last word on Green Warbler (or any other species) remains far off. Whoever suggested otherwise? There may be those who claim to know all the answers, but Rarities Committee members are not amongst them. Most of us are content to make a contribution, and would not presume to do more.

A. R. DEAN

2 Charingworth Road, Solihull, West Midlands B92 8HT

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# Best recent black-and-white bird-photographs

Once again, we are delighted to present our annual selection for this feature, now in its twenty-seventh year. A journal such as ours inevitably relies heavily on black-and-white photographs, so we must confess to a double motivation in running this feature. Primarily, of course, the intention is to enable our readers to enjoy a series of outstanding bird photographs while at the same time encouraging bird photographers by publishing their work. Our ulterior motive is that, in attracting photographs for the competition, we also obtain prints which can be retained in our files for future use.

May we take this opportunity to encourage bird photographers, who perhaps may not have considered working in black-and-white, to do some of their work in this way? Such photography can be very satisfactory, particularly when the photographer also does the developing and printing.

This year, we show the work of eight photographers; sadly, no newcomers have submitted work of sufficient quality this year. Other factors being equal, we try to give priority to those whose photographs have not previously been featured here, and it is with disappointment that we cannot do so this year. We must, however, highlight the achievement of three of this year's contributors, who have each had three prints selected. Dr Kevin Carlson's photographs are included for the fifteenth year; Harold Grenfell's for the eleventh year; and Mike Wilkes's for the fourth year. Whilst there are no new photographers, we are, however, including no less than five species that have not featured here before. These are: Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*, Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*, Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*, Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* and Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*.

The first photograph in our feature (plate 234) is a fine shot of a Redwing *Turdus iliacus* feeding (on New Year's Day) on hawthorn berries. It is both a fine portrait and a fine study of the bird in action, well lit, giving a final result that must have given Mike Wilkes, the photographer, much satisfaction. A different action shot is provided by Kevin Carlson's well-caught study of three displaying Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* (plate 235); doubtless they are disputing the boundaries of their feeding territories. The centre bird shows well the aggressor's flattened look, with puffed flank feathers, illustrated in *BWP* (vol. 3, page 120).

The following pair of photographs feature swans: four Whoopers *Cygnus cygnus* in flight by Richard Mills, and two swimming Mute Swans by Mike Wilkes. Richard Mills, who has two prints selected this year, is represented for the second time in this feature. We much enjoyed his shot of the Whooper Swans coming in to land, using their apparently enormous webbed feet as air brakes (plate 236). The use of a wide-angle lens from a low viewpoint has provided Mike Wilkes with a most original portrait of the two Mute Swans (plate 237), the second, though more distant and behind the first, adding to the picture rather than detracting from it.



234. Redwing *Turdus iliacus* eating berry of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Worcestershire, January 1985 (M. C. Wilkes) (Olympus OM2n, 300 mm Zuiko; FP4, 1/125, f8)

235. Three Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* displaying, Portugal, May 1985 (Kevin Carlson) (Nikon FE2, 400 mm Novoflex; FP4)







236. Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* coming in to land, Co. Waterford, February 1985 (*Richard T. Mills*)  
(Nikon FE2, 600 mm Nikkor; Tri-X, 1/500, f5.6)

237. Mute Swans *Cygnus olor*, Worcestershire, February 1983 (*M. C. Wilkes*) (Olympus OM2n, 28 mm  
Zuiko; FP4, auto, f11)



238. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, West Glamorgan, October 1985 (*Harold E. Grenfell*) (Nikon, 300 mm Nikkor; Tri-X, 1/500, f11)







**239.** Gannet *Sula bassana* carrying nesting material, Co. Wexford, June 1985 (*Richard T. Mills*) (Nikon FE2, 180 mm Nikkor; Tri-X, 1/2000, f8)

**240.** Common Gull *Larus canus*, West Glamorgan, October 1985 (*Harold E. Grenfell*) (Nikon, 500 mm Nikkor; Tri-X, 1/2000, f8)





241. Juvenile Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*, Netherlands, November 1985 (*P. Munsterman*)  
(Nikon FE2, 400 mm Nikkor; Tri-X, 1/250, f5.6)

242. Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, West Glamorgan, August 1985 (*Harold E. Grenfell*) (Nikon, 300 mm  
Nikkor; Tri-X, 1/1000, f5.6)







243. Sand Martins *Riparia riparia*, Worcestershire, June 1985 (Mark Hamblin) (Pentax MX, 300 mm Pentax; FP4, 1/250, f5.6)

244. Brent Geese *Branta bernicla*, Norfolk, March 1985 (Anthony J. Bond) (Canon A1, 300 mm Canon; FP4, auto, f8)







245. Male Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* passing food to female at nest with four 3- to 4-day-old nestlings, Argyll, May 1985 (Martin B. Withers) (Mamiya RB67, 250 mm Secko; FP4, 1/400, f16)

246. Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* displaying at nest, Worcestershire, May 1985 (M. C. Wilkes) (Olympus OM2n, 28 mm Zuiko; FP4, fill-in flash, f11)







247. Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* building nest, Portugal, June 1985 (Kevin Carlson) (Nikon FE2, 135 mm Nikkor; FP4)

248. Male Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* at nest, Portugal, May 1985 (Kevin Carlson) (Nikon FE2, 135 mm Nikkor; FP4)





Harold Grenfell's Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* (plate 238) is a fine study; the fishing bird is well placed in the frame, standing out well from the dark, neutral background, the ripples and reflection completing a delightful photograph. Next come two flight shots, the first showing a Gannet *Sula bassana* flying in to the nesting colony with nesting material, photographed by Richard Mills (plate 239). We hope that the trailing streamer, which adds so much to the interest of the picture, is seaweed, and not discarded plastic. Complementing the Gannet is another seabird in flight, an adult winter Common Gull *Larus canus* just taking off from the surface of the water, leaving behind a mass of water droplets and rings of ripples, photographed by Harold Grenfell (plate 240). This is the second time that we have featured Piet Munsterman's work. This year, he has submitted a fine shot of a Pomarine Skua (plate 241), which, like the Common Gull, also appears to have just taken off. That we should receive such a picture this year is not so surprising in view of last autumn's invasion (see 'Request', *Brit. Birds* 79: 261). The photograph shows well the pale, dark-tipped bill and the whitish crescent on the under primary coverts that are useful features for the identification of juveniles of this species (*Brit. Birds* 77: 446-448). An attractive study of a calling juvenile Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* at the water's edge (plate 242) is the third of Harold Grenfell's selection; again, it is well framed, with interesting ripples and reflections in the water.

The next double-page spread has three nest photographs. Mark Hamblin has sent us a delightful study of Sand Martins *Riparia riparia* at their nest hole (plate 243), showing how these birds choose the more sandy, less stony horizons in the river bank or sand-pit face in which to excavate their nests. Tony Bond, who has had a photograph selected for the eighth successive year, has lived up to his own high standard with a fine group of ten Brent Geese *Branta bernicla* (plate 244), none of which is obscured by any of the others and all of which are in sharp focus, in spite of their obviously fairly rapid movement past the photographer.

Martin Withers's interesting nest shot of a pair of Choughs *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* (plate 245), the male passing food to the female which she then fed to the three- to four-day-old young, is a fine example of nest photography (for this species an NCC licence is required), showing well the nest in a derelict barn. The Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*, displaying at the nest (plate 246), is a well-taken shot by Mike Wilkes which again shows that nest photography can provide opportunity for unusual pictures.

The final page shows two of Kevin Carlson's nest photographs, both taken last year in Portugal. The upper (plate 247) is a most interesting, and at the same time delightfully composed, shot of a Red-rumped Swallow nest building. The lower photograph (plate 248) is a more conventional, but equally attractive, shot of a male Sardinian Warbler at its neat, compact nest. It is hard to imagine how this latter might be bettered.

Once again we should like to thank all the photographers who submitted their work for selection. May we also again urge those bird photographers who have not tried black-and-white to give it a go, and then let us see a selection of their best work?

R. J. CHANDLER, ERIC HOSKING, J. T. R. SHARROCK and DON SMITH



# Rarities Committee news and announcements

*P. J. Grant and the Rarities Committee*

**C**ommittee membership is listed on the inside front cover each month, and on the back of the title page. In the absence of further nominations (*Brit. Birds* 78: 473), John Marchant started his official term of membership on 1st April this year, having earlier filled (as a co-opted member) the vacancy left by David Holman, who resigned in July 1985. David's presence will be greatly missed by the Committee, and we thank him for his valuable contribution to our work during more than eight years' membership.

The following points of interest arise from the Committee's annual meeting at Blunham, Bedfordshire, on 22nd March 1986.

## Escapes

The Committee agreed that it should make every effort to record all occurrences of free-flying individuals of species on its list, even those suspected or known certainly to have escaped from captivity. We therefore welcome receipt of such records, which should be submitted in the usual way. Certain escapes, and those considered by the Committee as likely to be of captive origin (*Brit. Birds* 77: 292) will be mentioned in the species-comments in our annual reports, but not included in the systematic list or in the running totals. In this way, we hope to establish a picture of the escape likelihood of each species, which will be useful for assessing the likely origin of other occurrences.

## Observer credits

Up to three observers' names are included, in alphabetical order, after each record in our annual report. Generally, only the names of those who have actually submitted evidence (individually, or as a joint report by several observers) are included. If more than three observers send descriptions, priority is given to those who first found or identified the bird, whenever this is made clear in the details submitted. When this is not clear or is disputed, or when the finder or identifier does not submit a description (or one is not submitted on his/her behalf), a more arbitrary choice of three names unavoidably has to be made from among those who have sent descriptions. As a result of several requests, the Committee considered whether it was possible to indicate (for example, by means of a symbol or different typeface) which of the named observers was the finder or identifier, thus giving them the desired greater credit. After lengthy consideration of all the ramifications of adopting such a system, however, the Committee decided that it would be no easy task, and might well produce problems.

In any case, it was felt that such a system might dissuade observers from sending in reports of rarities of which they were not the finder or identifier. Such back-up reports often greatly assist the assessment process, and we encourage their submission. The Committee generally disagreed with the

view held in some quarters that the submission of such back-up reports constitutes a form of ornithological poaching. We understand this point of view, however, and urge all submitters of back-up reports to state who was the finder or identifier: if this information is not known, the submitter should at least state clearly that he/she was not one of them.

### Election of new member

The Committee's nomination for the next vacancy (which will arise on or before 31st March 1987 from resignation or the longest-serving member's automatic retirement) is Alan Brown. Alan is secretary of the *Scottish Birds Records Committee*, recorder for East Lothian, and joint compiler of the *Scottish and Lothian Bird Reports*. He is widely travelled in the West Palearctic, and his knowledge of the Scottish birdwatching scene would also be valuable to the Committee's work. As usual, we invite any other nominations, which should be sent to me by 31st December 1986. If further nominations are forthcoming, a postal election will take place, in which county and regional recorders and the bird observatories will vote.

*P. J. Grant, 14 Heathfield Road, Ashford, Kent TN24 8QD*

**249.** Members of the 'British Birds' Rarities Committee, Bedfordshire, March 1986. Left to right, Keith Vinicombe, Dr J. T. R. Sharrock (Managing Editor), John Marchant, P. J. Grant (Chairman), Alan Dean, Iain Robertson, M. J. Rogers (Secretary), Tim Inskipp, and D. J. Britton. (R. H. Dennis, P. G. Lansdown and S. C. Madge were unable to attend this meeting)  
(*Erika Sharrock*)





# Announcements

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**Binding your 'BB'** Standard bookbinding of your *BB* issues is still available (use the form on the back of the index supplied with each December issue), at £11.50 per volume. Those received by the binders will henceforth be dealt with in batches, to avoid unnecessarily long delays between posting and return to subscribers. It will, therefore, be to your advantage to ensure that copies arrive with the binders a few days before one of their four deadlines: 15th January, 15th March, 1st July and 1st October. Copies should be sent to the binders (NOT to *BB*): P. G. Chapman & Co. Ltd, Kent House Lane, Beckenham, Kent BR3 1LD.

Loose binders are, of course, also still available, through British BirdShop at £5.95 (see page xxii).

**Bird sound recordings** We regret to have to announce that we can no longer offer the discs and cassettes of *A Field Guide to the Bird Songs of Britain and Europe* through British BirdShop, since supplies are not available from the Swedish manufacturers.

**New books in British BirdShop** In addition to the continuing special offer concerning *The Frontiers of Bird Identification*, we can now also offer the following new books:

Beehler, Pratt & Zimmerman *Birds of New Guinea* (Princeton University Press)

Gooders & Harris *Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland* (Kingfisher)

Hammond, *Twentieth Century Wildlife Artists* (Christopher Helm)

Hilty, Brown & Tudor *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia* (Princeton University Press)

Potts *The Partridge* (Collins)

Please use the form on page xxii now.

## Reviews

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**Tunncliffe's Birdlife. By Noel Cusa.** Orbis, London, 1985. 150 pages; 117 colour plates; 11 line-drawings. Paperback £12.00.

Charles Tunncliffe is probably best known to us for his comprehensive collection of superbly meticulous and accurate measured drawings. Although beautiful in their own right, these were really only reference material for the finished paintings which were his ultimate aim and probably his greatest work, but which have, sadly, remained largely unseen. This book, a collection of over 100 superb paintings and many smaller sketches, sets out to rectify this and to show Tunncliffe as the truly great artist he was.

The book is written by Noel Cusa, who was a close friend of Tunncliffe and is himself one of our leading wildlife artists. It is a large-format book, well laid out with over 100 of its 150 pages occupied by well-printed colour plates. These paintings are arranged in sections correspond-

ing roughly to family groups. The introduction briefly deals with Tunnicliffe's life and the development of his work and is written with obvious enthusiasm and admiration. Each plate has its own commentary, which pleasantly mixes ornithological interest with artistic considerations, often explaining the composition and describing how colours in the painting have been used to great effect. The paintings themselves show that Tunnicliffe had a tremendous understanding of birds and their environment. He had that enviable ability to capture a bird's shape, attitude and jizz; whatever viewing angle or position the bird is in, it always looks totally natural and convincing. His birds are full of life and movement, even in pictures of birds in repose. The paintings of Curlews and Redshanks alighting are quite simply brilliant, not only because they are beautifully painted, but also because the birds really do seem to move across the page, and the quality of light in each painting is superb. His acute observation also extended to the environment in which his birds are portrayed, a particular favourite of mine being a 'Company of Whitefronts' in the snow, which captures the bitter cold of an estuary in winter so well that I felt quite cold looking at it!

The last section of the book, entitled 'Bird Painting', describes the methods of drawing and painting that Tunnicliffe employed in his work, and is illustrated with many of his sketches, showing in some cases how a particular painting developed from the field sketch through coloured composition studies to the finished article. This section necessarily calls for reference to paintings reproduced earlier in the book, which involves flipping pages back and forth, which can be a bit frustrating, but this is a minor criticism and does not really detract from the immense enjoyment that this book gave to me.

CHRIS ROSE

**Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland. By John Gooders. Illustrated by Alan Harris.** Kingfisher Books, London, 1986. 288 pages; over 300 colour illustrations; 255 distribution maps. Paperback, £5.95.

With so many ornithological field guides on the market, the question that must be asked is: what does this guide offer that the others don't? The answer is easy: superb illustrations by Alan Harris, and a list of species limited to 255, making it particularly suitable for the newcomer to birdwatching, who will thus avoid being confused by rarities he is unlikely to encounter. As a field guide, it also incorporates a number of other novel features, some more successful than others, reflecting the considerable effort the author has made to offer something different or 'extra' that other guides do not have.

It is necessary, therefore, to describe the format of the guide in some detail. So far as size is concerned, it is similar to other 'pocket' guides (20 cm × 12 cm), with the usual introductory section on identifying birds, making field notes, field equipment, and so forth. Voous's sequence of species is used, and English names and bird topography nomenclature follow those used in this journal. The 255 species are placed in 18 groups (divers and grebes; herons; pigeons and cuckoos; etc.), each group being colour-coded at the top corner of the relevant section of the book for quick reference. Each species-description, complete with illustrations and distribution map, occupies a single page.

Alan Harris's illustrations are detailed, accurate, and reflect the character of the birds; that of the Dunnock particularly caught my eye in this respect. Most of the more distinctive plumages of each species are shown, and each species is illustrated in the attitude in which the bird is most likely to be seen. Divers and grebes (apart from one flight illustration) are on the water; shearwaters and petrels in flight; gulls and waders both on the ground and in flight; raptors perched and in flight from below; while most passerines are just shown perched. Important field marks are stressed by arrows and brief notes. Both the various plumages and the field marks to which attention is drawn are almost always well chosen. I found the illustrations of the various races of the Rock Pipit particularly instructive. My only criticisms in this respect are minor, and mainly relate to the omission of juvenile plumages where these differ significantly from the adult. There is, for example, no illustration of a juvenile White-fronted Goose, whose lack of a white forehead and barred underparts often confuse the beginner. The distinctive juvenile plumages of Knot and Sanderling do not appear, though many other juvenile waders are illustrated. Another notable field mark not shown (though it is mentioned) is the wedge-shaped tail of the Raven, so useful for the identification of the flying bird.

I noted few errors in the illustrations. The 'adult autumn' Dunlin, in spite of showing 'spots of black from summer plumage' on its flanks, is, in fact, a juvenile. The Curlew has darkish



green, rather than pale grey legs. But these are minor quibbles in what must be the most delightfully illustrated of all the British field guides.

The text accompanying each species is in two parts; a brief description of the bird and its status, and a tabulation of information, each time following the same format. This tabulation covers bird type (e.g. 'wader-like'); size; habitat; general behaviour; voice; identification features; breeding details (nest, eggs, incubation period, etc.); food; and an estimate of the population of the British Isles. An error repeated twice in the text (pages 155 and 158) is reference to the Scandinavian race of the Lesser Black-backed Gull as *Larus f. graellsii*; it should, of course, be *Larus f. fuscus*.

I felt that the 'Identification tabulation' often duplicated information provided both with the illustration and in the general text. Also, in this section, the entry under voice will puzzle a beginner, as it applies randomly to either call or song, with no indication as to which of the two is being considered. For example, the voice of the Mistle Thrush is described as a 'loud tuk-tuk', without mention either of its more usual dry, rattling call or of its characteristic song. In contrast, on the facing page, the corresponding entry describes the song of the Cetti's Warbler.

Completing each page is a three-colour map showing breeding, wintering and year-round resident areas, and a seasonal 'abundance chart'. This excellent feature uses a scale of 0 to 6 to indicate the likelihood of seeing the bird, on a monthly basis, in typical habitat. This chart works well, but, even off Cape Clear Island or St Ives in August and September, Great and Cory's Shearwaters surely need more than the 'bit of searching' which their abundance charts suggest.

The foregoing comments are by no means serious criticism. This is an excellent field guide that I can warmly recommend to all beginners, and whose illustrations will delight even the most expert.

R. J. CHANDLER

**Shorebirds: an identification guide to the waders of the world.** By Peter Hayman, John Marchant and Tony Prater. Croom Helm, London & Sydney, 1986. 412 pages; 88 colour plates; some line-drawings and 214 distribution maps. £19.95.

The publication, in 1977, of the BTO *Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holarctic Waders* by Tony Prater, John Marchant and Juhani Vuorinen, marked a milestone in wader identification (*Brit. Birds* 71: 420). Now, the first two authors have teamed up with artist Peter Hayman to establish another milestone: an identification guide to the waders of the world. But how do the two guides compare? Can my well worn copy of the BTO guide now be left on the shelf?

Well, *Shorebirds* is primarily, as its title suggests, a guide to field identification. (The use of the American term 'Shorebirds' is presumably intended to increase the book's appeal to readers in that continent.) As a field guide, it is somewhat bulky, with both size and format similar to Peter Harrison's *Seabirds* (1983), to which it forms a companion volume. As with the latter, *Shorebirds* has an introductory section, followed by 88 plates (with accompanying text and distribution maps) which illustrate all the world's species, shown in all their major plumages. The second half of the book provides more detailed information, species by species, on not only identification and description, but also voice, habits, movements, ageing, racial differences and measurements.

A total of 214 species is recognised, including the South American seedsnipes *Attagis* and *Thinocorus*, though the sheath-bills *Chionis* are omitted. A handful of species thought probably to be extinct are included, a policy that has paid off with the recent rediscovery of Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* (*Brit. Birds* 79: 262). So far as 'lumping' and 'splitting' are concerned, the authors seem to have made all the sensible decisions. Black-winged (European) and Black-necked (American) Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* are lumped, whilst the American *Pluvialis dominica* and Pacific Golden Plovers *P. fulva* are split. Even the mysterious, almost mythical, Cox's Sandpiper *Calidris paramelanotos* is included, albeit with the caveat that it may be a stereotyped hybrid.

My only serious criticism, which I suspect will be echoed by many readers, is that the sequence of species followed is based on Clements (1982, *Birds of the World: a checklist*), which differs significantly from that of Voous. Surely, it would not have been too difficult to expand Voous's list of Holarctic species?

The plates are superb. Though most show two or three species, a few species qualify for a plate to themselves, when many plumages and races have to be illustrated. The Dunlin *Calidris alpina* is one of these, and no less than 25 different birds on the ground and in flight, plus details of heads and tail patterns, are shown. All the Dunlin's seasonal plumages are illustrated in this way, together with six of its races. As one might expect from Peter Hayman, the various birds are shown in characteristic poses and in the most accurate feather-by-feather detail. Though he has clearly worked extensively from skins, the character of the various species is well caught, with occasional smaller inset illustrations to show, for example, the Dunlin's typically hunched appearance, or the Long-toed Stint's *C. subminuta* characteristic, head-up, alert posture.

The plates do not follow exactly the sequence of the main text, but, where appropriate, similar species are illustrated together. Stilt *Micropalama himantopus* and Curlew Sandpipers *C. ferruginea* are one example; another is Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* and Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*. And, of course, confusion pairs which occur together in the species list, such as Little *C. minuta* and Red-necked Stint *C. ruficollis*, Greater *Tringa melanoleuca* and Lesser Yellowlegs *T. flavipes* and Far Eastern *Numenius madagascariensis* and Long-billed Curlew *N. americanus*, are shown together. Often, different species in the same plumage are also shown side-by-side in the same pose on the same plate. Additionally, there are two plates showing together for direct comparison all the stints *Calidris* in juvenile and in summer plumage. Individual birds on the plates are given numbers, for reference to the description opposite; occasionally it is not clear to which bird the numbers refer, and occasionally no reference number is given. Some plates have delightful backgrounds, hinting at the species' habitat; on the last plate, that showing the South American seedsnipes, the background also includes four condors.

The second half of the book adds detailed commentary, with between a half a page and a full page of text for each species. These accounts are as detailed in their way as the illustrations. They are primarily concerned with identification and plumage description, but in addition there is a useful summary of seasonal movements and records of vagrancy. There is a series of useful tables which amplify the distinguishing features of several groups of similar species. An appendix adds information obtained at a late stage in production, and the book is completed with a comprehensive list of references and index.

So how does it rate? Well, the whole book is characterised by both scholarship and attention to detail, and reflects great credit not only on the authors, but also on the publishers. The attention to detail applies not only to the text and plates, but also to the indexing and cross-referencing, the latter making the book a delight to use. Without doubt, this is an essential addition for the shorebird enthusiast's library, and as an identification guide it is difficult to see how it might be improved. But, since it deals with identification in the field rather than in the hand, and hence has a different emphasis from the BTO guide, my copy of the latter will continue to get used.

R. J. CHANDLER

## News and comment

*Robin Prytherch and Mike Everett*

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'

**A winning Birdwatch** A major objective of the recent *Country Life*/RSNC County Birdwatch was to raise money for the British Wildlife Appeal. The total of £12,000 is a sure indication of the success of the venture this year. But, of course, seeing birds—as many species as possible—was the preoccupation of the day (10th or 11th May 1986), when 60 teams raced around their chosen county, notching up as many species as possible in a 24-hour period. The panel of judges devised a cunning method of balancing the different





**250.** Don Taylor (right), team leader of the 'Woolwich Watchers' from Kent, receiving the *Country Life* Barn Owl trophy from Bill Oddie, one of the event's judges, at reception at Rutland Water, Leicestershire, June 1986 (*Country Life*)

potential of each county. Target figures were calculated and the winners were judged by the percentage of their target that they achieved. The winners were a team from Kent, the 'Woolwich Watchers' (Don Taylor, Bob Bland, Andrew Henderson and David Tomlinson), with 143 species, or 76.47% of the target figure. They won the *Country Life* prize of £500 and the Barn Owl Trophy (plate 250). The team with the highest score was 'North Norfolk and Norwich' with 147 species (75%), which placed them second, and won them the Collins Publishers prize of £250. Third were the 'Rutland Dippers': their 108 species (72.48%) was also the highest score for an inland county, which won £300 from *Country Life* Books. The 'Yorkshire High Batts' team won the Barbour Trophy (worth £500) for the most sponsorship money raised (£750). All prize money actually went to the relevant County Trusts. The collective total species list was 209; just another statistic that marks this Birdwatch event as the most successful of its kind ever in Britain. Now for the next year!

**'Alghero Declaration (1986)'** All of us, and particularly those with a special interest in seabirds, will applaud the recent recommendations made at the First Mediterranean Seabird Symposium, held at Alghero,

Sardinia, in March this year. Organised by 'Medmaravis', the Mediterranean Marine Bird Association, the Symposium was attended by 60 seabird biologists from ten countries. The proceedings will be published shortly (in English—enquiries to Springer Verlag, Postfach 105280, Heidelberg 6900, West Germany), but the most urgent communication of the Symposium is known as the 'Mediterranean Seabird Declaration of Alghero'. In essence, it urges that special protection be given to the ten most important seabird sites not fully protected so far: Cabrera Archipelago, Balearics, Spain; Chafarinas Islands, Alboran Sea, Spain; Columbretes Archipelago, Spain; Dionysades Island, Crete, Greece; Filfla Island, Malta; Grendi Islets, Kerkenah, Tunisia; La Maddalena Archipelago, Sardinia, Italy; Linosa Island, Italy; Marettimo Island, Sicily, Italy; and North Sporades Archipelago, Greece. Other sites will be added to this list as soon as biological evidence is provided. The Declaration also urges that further census work be encouraged in the poorly researched eastern Mediterranean and asks for more international co-operation between the researchers in the various Mediterranean countries. It also appeals directly to the Governments and regional authorities in Italy and Spain who are responsible for certain sites (some of which



are included in the ten sites mentioned above), namely the Po Delta and the islands and coast of northern Sardinia in Italy and, in Spain, the Ebro Delta with its breeding Slender-billed Gulls *Larus genei* and terns, and the Chafarinas Islands. The latter hold 70% of the world's breeding population of Audouin's Gull *L. audouinii*, as well as thousands of pairs of Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris diomedea* and the very rare monk seal *Monachus monachus*.

**The Ramsar Convention Protocol** The 'Convention on wetlands of international importance especially as waterfowl habitat' (usually called the 'Ramsar' Convention after the Caspian city in Iran where the text was agreed at a Conference in 1971) is one of the four global conservation treaties adopted in the 1970s (the others are the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the Unesco World Heritage Convention, and the Bonn Convention on Migratory Species). Governments which join Ramsar agree to make 'wise use' of wetlands in their territory and, more specifically, to designate at least one wetland for the 'List of wetlands of international importance'. Notice of any change, or of any likely change, in ecological character has to be given to IUCN, the body responsible for continuing bureau functions, and, if a site is deleted from the List, another of equivalent value has to be included in compensation.

So far, 39 countries have joined, listing 335 sites covering nearly 20 million hectares. No wetland has been deleted from the List. While this is a habitat convention, concerned with wetlands, the main thrust so far has been in terms of waterfowl, largely because of the involvement since the 1960s of the International Waterfowl Research Bureau (IWRB, headquarters at Slimbridge). The UK is one of the 39 Contracting Parties, and has so far listed 28 wetlands. Ministers have on several occasions made statements in Parliament identifying the 130-odd sites in Britain which qualify for listing in Britain on waterfowl grounds. At the last conference of the Contracting Parties in 1984, the UK delegate said it was hoped to list nearly all these sites by the end of 1986. It seems most unlikely that this aim will be achieved in time, but as British Rail *Rallus britannicus* says, 'We're getting there'.

The latest event in the Ramsar saga is that the Protocol of Amendment was signed on 11th June 1986 by Iceland (the 22nd party)

and will come into force on 1st November 1986. ('So what?' I hear you cry.) This is all part of the efforts to give international legal backing (or at least moral pressure) to conservation undertakings. The original text of the Ramsar Convention did not provide for amendments, so a Protocol, allowing amendments, had to be added and approved by 22 states. Now the Protocol is in force, meaningful amendments (notably finance for a permanent secretariat) can be discussed at the next Conference of the Parties, to be held in Canada in May 1987, so the timing is just right.

The Canada Conference will also be extremely important for other reasons: the existing 39 members will have to report on their progress under the Convention; and a special effort will be made to persuade more developing countries to join. It is worth noting that the Canadian government, despite financial cutbacks, is making an enormous contribution to international conservation by hosting this year's World Conservation Strategies, ICBP and International Ornithological Conferences, and next year's Ramsar and CITES conferences. (Contributed by Michael Smart)

**Birdwatching at Lake Skadar** Lake Skadar, Skadarsko Jezero, Yugoslavia, covers 35,500 ha (61% in Yugoslavia, 39% in Albania); a National Park has recently been established on the Yugoslavian side. It has long been recognised as one of the main Yugoslavian wetlands, and is listed as a site of International Importance for waterbirds. In the north of the lake, several rivers form a huge swampy area with flooded trees and reeds which hold significant colonies of several species of heron and tern, and Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*. Some 15-20 pairs of the highly endangered Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* also breed there, and are often seen. In winter, the lake holds up to 30,000 ducks, including Teal *Anas crecca*, Pochard *Aythya ferina*, Ferruginous Duck *A. nyroca* and Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*. The National Park is anxious to establish various wildlife monitoring activities (counts carried out under IWRB guidance, ringing, and so on), but also wishes to develop more active birdwatching tourism. Several uninhabited villages could provide accommodation. Anyone interested should contact: Mrs Bojana Vujanovic (Public relations), SIZ NP Skadarsko Jezero, Jerevanska 30, YU-81000 Titograd, Yugoslavia; telephone 081 34 810. (Contributed by Michael Smart)



**News from the Falkland Islands** We have received a copy of the first issue of *Trust News*, to be issued quarterly by the Falklands Islands Trust. It is a newsletter for members of the Trust, consisting mainly of short articles, information and requests. One interesting item under 'News in Brief' was the report of several 'waves' of Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis* which entered the islands during the (austral) autumn. After some north-northwesterly gales on 15th April, there was the biggest-ever influx recorded; up to 3,000 were seen throughout the islands.

**Lead shot ban in Denmark** From 1st August 1986, use of lead shot will be prohibited in Danish Ramsar sites (Denmark has 26 Ramsar sites, covering 593,000 ha, so the prohibition covers a wide area). Non-toxic shot will still be permitted in areas where shooting is allowed. This, to my knowledge, is the first instance in Europe of legislation against lead shot, though in North America it has for several years been prohibited at specific sites. (Contributed by Michael Smart)

**'A Middle Eastern Evening'** The Ornithological Society of the Middle East joined with the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society on the evening of 14th May for a joint session at the Meeting Rooms of the Zoological Society of London at Regent's Park. A very large audience heard Dr Lindon Cornwallis on 'Bird conservation in Iran', giving good news of Iranian wildlife conservationists, with whom contact had recently been re-established. After Dr Michael Rands had described aspects of the OSME expedition to the Yemen, the new OSME film of the expedition was shown. When introduced, it was stressed that this was not one of the aims of the expedition, but the highly professional result belied this. The Yemen has a number of endemics and there are other species now probably extinct or nearly extinct in Saudi Arabia, but with populations surviving in the Yemen (e.g. the Arabian Bustard *Ardeotis arabs*). (JTRS)

**Overseas bird tours** The firm Business Travel Team, based at Haywards Heath in West Sussex, perhaps do not realise how appropriately named is their contact: 'ring Bob White on 0444-417521'. Unfortunately, their Press Release covering the inauguration of their foreign bird tours refers to ornithologists going 'bird-spotting' and talks of 'bird lovers'; reads as if they are unaware of any other companies organising foreign trips for birdwatchers; and makes no mention of any ornithological leader accompanying their trips. Let us hope, however, for the sake of anyone who does book with them, that they eventually get it right.

Completed forms for our 'Overseas bird tours survey' are currently pouring in. Analysis will not start for a month or more, but it is already clear that certain of the well-known companies are being very highly praised by almost everyone who has travelled with their groups, but that others have provided such poor ornithological leaders, or have otherwise proved unsatisfactory, that people accompanying the trips wish they had never done so. Perhaps even more than any of our previous surveys, the results of this one should prove very helpful to *BB* readers; it should give a big boost to the small number of companies which are giving really good value for money, and, hopefully, will force those providing a poor service to review their operating methods and 'pull up their socks'. (We shall publish the results of this survey as soon as possible, but we regret that we cannot reply individually to correspondents requesting advance information.) (JTRS)

**Let's have some common sense, chaps!** M. Back, Head of Traffic and Customer Services Section at British Rail, Cambridge, has sent us this extract from one of his Area Controller's logs for 7th June 1986: 'Lakenheath reported at 11.45 that 3-4 birdwatchers were ensconced in the UP MAIN [at a named locality which we are omitting] near the site of some rare bird, which annually attracts birdwatchers from all over. These watchers had set up tripods in the UP MAIN, to watch the nest of this rare ornithological beauty, whilst trains went by, on the DOWN. British Transport Police advised at 11.46. Civil Police [locality omitted] advised at 11.48. Lakenheath advised at 12.49 that it was all clear at 12.43.'

We all (or most of us) can guess which rare species is involved. Apart from risking their own lives, trespassing on British Rail property can also endanger train passengers. As Mr Back commented, '... to set up equipment in the middle of the track of the main line is foolhardy, to say the least, and this is why birdwatchers as a whole are liable to get a bad name'. Perhaps those who were involved in this instance did not consider all the possible consequences of their action.



**251.** Alan Moffett (left), winner of the award for 'Bird Photograph of the Year 1986', with his Red Grouse trophy presented by John Hughes of *The Famous Grouse* Scotch whisky (right). London, June 1986 (*Don Smith*)

**BPY '86** The award presentation to Alan Moffett, winner of this year's 'Bird Photograph of the Year' competition, was made at a Press reception at the Scotch Whisky Association in London on 2nd June. The competition was sponsored for the sixth successive year by Matthew Gloag & Son Ltd, proprietors of *The Famous Grouse* Scotch whisky, and, as well as his cheque, Alan Moffett was presented with a Red Grouse trophy by John Hughes, Southern Area Manager for *The Famous Grouse* (plate 251).

**'Twentieth Century Wildlife Artists'** To launch this book, Croom Helm has arranged a special exhibition at The Mall Galleries, London, during 25th-28th September.

**Not far from Scilly** ... lies the French island of Ushant (Ouessant in French). The second volume of the *Bulletin du Centre Ornithologique d'Ouessant* covers the year 1985. There are 76 duplicated pages, crammed with information. It is all in French; but, with scientific names, dates and numerals, it is browsable and readable by migration and rarity-oriented birdwatchers with no gift for foreign languages. It is obtainable (price 30.00 Frs + 13.50 Frs postage) from Le Directeur, Parc Naturel Régional d'Armorique, Ménez Meur, Hanvec, 29224 Daoulas, France. (*JTRS*)

**Crispin Fisher** We recently asked Crispin Fisher, winner of the title 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' in 1979 (*Brit. Birds* 72: 403-409), for news of what he has been up to recently. He replied: 'I take it that you mean activities which may directly have arisen from your very splendid competition—and fair enough.'

'I think that it must have been directly as the result of the competition that Norman Elkins asked Trevor Poyser to commission me to do the illustrations for *Weather and Bird Behaviour*, and I can say that that was the job, the single job, which I have enjoyed most in my life. It gave me the opportunity to draw birds actually doing things in their habitat, which is what I think makes the most interesting illustrations, and certainly the most enjoyable to do.'

'I know for a fact that it was directly as a result of the competition that John Pembrton asked me to do illustrations, and especially the cover every year, of *The Birdwatchers' Year Book*, a commission which I enjoy enormously and look forward to every year. (This year it is a Great Grey Shrike—my favourite bird.)'

'I regularly do work for the Lincolnshire and South Humberside Trust for Nature Conservation, most of it as displays, panels and guides for their showpiece interpretative reserve at Gibraltar Point. For the Wildfowl



Trust, I have painted two sets of six panels each for permanent displays in their hides, and am working on the third six.

'But, above all, I am now, as you have already reported in *BB*, the Natural History Editor at Collins, a job I have always wanted, and whose founding incumbent was my father.'

**Ottawa IOC** The XIX International Ornithological Congress, held in Ottawa, Canada, during 22nd-29th June 1986, was the largest ever, with over 1,200 delegates from over 70 countries. I have often expressed the view that it is the meetings over coffee and the intense discussions over lunch or dinner—the renewal of acquaintanceships and the making of new friends and contacts—that are the most important long-term results of such occasions. Nevertheless, one can hardly ignore the intellectual feast provided by 480-odd papers presented during 50 symposia, ranging in topic from 'Mechanisms of homing' to 'New methods in molecular evolution'. The five plenary (main) lectures which started off each daily session were by Dr Ian Newton, on 'Individual performance in Sparrowhawks: the ecology of two sexes'; by Dr Jacques Blondel, on 'Evolutionary biogeography and different scales: the history of Mediterranean birdlife'; by Dr Fred Cooke, on 'Genetic studies of birds—the goose with blue genes'; by Dr P. Berthold, on 'The control of migration in European warblers'; and by Dr M. A. Ramos Olmos, on 'Eco-evolutionary aspects of bird movements in the Northern Neotropical region'.

At such a conference, it is impossible to attend every lecture (since, apart from all else, there are usually five simultaneous sessions in progress), so one picks and chooses those expected to be most important, stimulating or relevant to one's own interests. The presentation (both verbal and visual) by Dr Berthold could not have been improved on in any way—even his timing, 59½ minutes in a 60-minute slot, was immaculate—and, together with the fascinating content, kept his whole audience attentive for every moment. From that highlight, one sinks to the lecturer who started by apologising for forgetting his slides (because he was so engrossed in following the World Cup!)—forget tie, or razor, perhaps, but *slides*?—and others whose slides were merely photographs of figures from their recently published papers, full of irrelevant and unreadable words and numbers. Dele-

gates to such a Congress should not need binoculars to enhance the lecturer's visual aids, but I did see them used for that purpose. I used mine on our one 'free day' to add 70 species to my life list (my first trip to the Nearctic) with the assistance of several of our ever-friendly and ever-helpful Canadian hosts. (*JTRS*)

**The next IOC** The 20th International Ornithological Congress will take place in Christchurch, New Zealand, during 18th-25th November 1990. Appropriately, that will be the 150th year of New Zealand Government and the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand. The Chairman of the New Zealand Organising Committee is Dr Ben D. Bell, Zoology Department, Victoria University of Wellington, Private Bag, Wellington, New Zealand.

**North American atlases** The latest news we have is that no fewer than 38 state, provincial or regional breeding bird atlases are complete, in active progress or in the final planning stages in the United States and Canada. Next to be published is likely to be that for Ontario. More news when we hear it.

**West African bird recordings** The French Ornithological Review *Alauda* has just published the 11th gramophone record in a series on the birds of West Africa (No. 13, a 33⅓ r.p.m. 10-inch disc). The set now includes about 85% of the species in the families treated; 461 species so far (with a total of 950 individual recordings). Each disc costs 80 FF plus post and packing. Enquiries should be addressed to Société d'Études Ornithologiques, 'Alauda', École Normale Supérieure Laboratoire de Zoologie, 46 rue d'Ulm, 75230 Paris Cedex 05, France.

**Three changes of Recorder** Dr Arthur Jennings, 1 Ferryfield Drive, Connel, Argyll PA37 1SP, has taken over from David Stroud as Recorder for Argyll. H. E. Rose, 12 Birbeck Road, Bristol BS9 1BD, has taken over from P. J. Chadwick as Recorder for Avon. R. Davis, 47 Clovelly Road, Glenfield, Leicester LE3 8AE, has taken over from Rodney Baker as Recorder for Leicestershire.

**Change of address of Recorder** John Dunnett, Recorder for Cleveland, has moved to 43 Hemlington Road, Stainton, Middlesbrough, Cleveland TS8 9AG.

# Recent reports

*Keith Allsopp and Ian Dawson*

**These are largely unchecked reports, not authenticated records**



The dates in this report refer to June unless otherwise stated.

Cool air moving southward on the eastern side of an anticyclone to the west brought some disturbed weather into North Sea areas during the first week of June. Pressure then rose over the Continent, but the initial change to westerly weather did not bring in much warmer air; only on 14th when the anticyclone extended over Britain and Ireland did hot air from the southeast bring the first days of summer weather and, apart from a few cloudy cooler days, the continental weather continued until the end of the month.

## Seabirds

Strong northerly winds at Spurn (Humberside) from 5th to 7th resulted in some interesting breeding-season (?) movements, the maximum activity being on 6th, with a northward movement involving 600

**Fulmars** *Fulmarus glacialis*, 116 **Manx Shearwaters** *Puffinus puffinus*, 1,600

**252.** Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*, Merseyside, June 1986 (Graeme Risdon)





**Kittiwakes** *Rissa tridactyla*, 800 **Razorbills** *Alca torda*/**Guillemots** *Uria aalge* and 225 **Gannets** *Sula bassana*. A Gannet was an unusual visitor to Lough Neagh (Northern Ireland) on 4th. A **Sabine's Gull** *Larus sabini* made a brief but exciting visit to Liverpool (Merseyside) on 2nd (plate 252), an area which also held a **Ring-billed Gull** *L. delawarensis* and an early **Glaucous Gull** *L. hyperboreus*. By mid month, a **Sooty Shearwater** *Puffinus griseus* had been seen at Porthgwarra (Cornwall) and a **Great Shearwater** *P. gravis* in the Irish Sea. A **Little Tern** *Sterna albifrons* was a notable unusual visitor to Orkney on 13th.

### Wading birds

Large white birds with long legs go well with hot sunny days, so **Great White Egrets** *Egretta alba* did not look out of place at Titchwell (Norfolk) and on Islay (Strathclyde) on 15th, and four **Little Egrets** *E. garzetta* were to be seen, at Falmouth (Cornwall) from 12th to 14th, at Minsmere (Suffolk) on 17th, at Dungeness (Kent) on 24th and at Orfordness (Suffolk) on 25th. Two **Spoonbills** *Platalea leucorodia* were reported, another one inland on the Nene Washes (Cambridgeshire) on 17th, and one at Liverpool (Merseyside) on 21st, and further sightings of **White Storks** *Ciconia ciconia* came from Wincanton (Somerset) on 27th May, Burley Lawn (Hampshire) on 30th May, Horsham (West Sussex) and Dartmoor (Devon) on 6th and Stodmarsh (Kent) on 19th. At the end of June, some species of Arctic waders, especially unsuccessful breeders, begin their autumn migration south, and this year the build up in numbers of **Spotted Redshanks** *Tringa erythropus* at Minsmere was very noticeable, the 40 present on 17th increasing to 60 by 30th. Wandering groups of **Avocets** *Recurvirostra avosetta* were reported at Spurn, with nine on 28th, and at Ferry Meadows (Cambridgeshire), with two on 30th. A summer-

plumaged female **Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius* was a gorgeous sight on Islay from 11th to 20th, as was a **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* also there from 18th to 23rd. **Red-necked Phalaropes** *Phalaropus lobatus* were seen at Minsmere on 12th and at Cley (Norfolk) on 16th. Following reports in May, there were further records of **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*, one near Kidderminster (Worcestershire), of **Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos*, one at Holme (Norfolk), and of **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus*, singles at Fleetwood (Lancashire) on 8th and Teesmouth (Cleveland) on 13th and 14th. Though nice to see, a **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularia* present at Cley from 11th to 13th could not compete with the verve of a **Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincola*, which performed at Dungeness from 18th to 25th, or with the uniqueness of a **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* at Hauxley (Northumberland) on 30th.

### Birds of prey

A sad but intriguing find was the corpse of a **Tengmalm's Owl** *Aegolius funereus* in Orkney on 25th, but perhaps more unusual for the islands was the presence of a **Scops Owl** *Otus scops* from 6th to 20th. During May, **Marsh Harriers** *Circus aeruginosus* were unusually common along the English east coast, with an estimated 18 passing through Spurn. June records included one at Teesmouth on 22nd and another at Holyhead Mountain, Anglesey (Gwynedd), on 15th. Late-returning **Rough-legged Buzzards** *Buteo lagopus* were seen also at Spurn on 7th and in Orkney on 15th. After the May influx of **Black Kites** *Milvus migrans*, one was reported from Shetland at the end of that month. **Ospreys** *Pandion haliaetus* away from the Highlands were found in Orkney on 7th, at Brentford (Essex) on 13th and 14th, Fleet Pond (Hampshire) on 16th and Lackford Gravel-pits (Suffolk) on 23rd.

### Passerine vagrants

Presumably the arrival of the hot Continental air brought **Crossbills** *Loxia curvirostra* to Fair Isle and Orkney between 14th and 17th, and later to Islay, where 15 were seen on 22nd. An earlier one at Spurn on 8th was followed by others on 23rd and 26th. Other arrivals on Fair Isle during this period of easterlies were a **Scarlet Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* on 16th and a **Chestnut Bunting** *Emberiza rutila* on 15th. **Black-headed Buntings** *E. melanocephala* had



earlier been reported at Colne Point (Essex) on 5th to 9th and from the Isles of Scilly; a **Red-headed Bunting** *E. bruniceps* stayed at Titchwell from 1st to 11th; a vagrant **Cirl Bunting** *E. cirlus* was seen at Bempton (Humberside) on 3rd, and a **Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* reached Orkney on 16th. There were quite a number of vagrant warblers found in June. A **Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* on 6th was the first recorded for Walney (Cumbria), another

first there being a **Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos* on 14th. A **Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria* on 22nd and a **Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* on 14th were seen in Orkney, the latter being a first there; four **Marsh Warblers** *A. palustris* visited Fair Isle, another was found singing at Walberswick (Suffolk) on 1st and yet another arrived at Dungeness on 27th. A **Savi's Warbler** *Locustella luscinioides* on Fair Isle on 7th was hard put to find a reed bed.

**253-255.** Male King Eider *Somateria spectabilis* with male Eider *S. mollissima*, Grampian, May 1986 (S. M. D. Alexander)





**Icterine Warblers** *Hippolais icterina* were heard in song on 8th and 18th at Spurn, and a **Bonelli's Warbler** *Phylloscopus bonelli* was found on Guernsey (Channel Islands) on 10th and 11th. A **Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis* was a splendid find on Anglesey on 4th to 6th, as were **Woodchat Shrikes** *Lanius senator* at Tunstall (Suffolk) on 7th and 8th and Lowestoft (Suffolk) from 1st to 10th, and a **Lesser Grey Shrike** *L. minor* in Shetland.

### Wet and windy birds

'Wet birds' include a few interesting wildfowl reports. Three **Brent Geese** *Branta bernicla* on Islay on 1st July were very early if returning winterers, as was one flying past Minsmere on 23rd. Male **King Eiders** *Somateria spectabilis* were seen on the Ythan (Grampian) from late May into June (plates 253-255), and another in Orkney on 27th, as was a **Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* on 23rd. Going like the wind were some 2,000 **Swifts** *Apus apus* in a southerly movement on 17th at Spurn. Also with them was a single **Alpine Swift** *A. melba*; a **Pallid Swift** *A. pallidus* was also seen at nearby Blacktoft (Humberside). Other exotics from the south were single **Bee-eaters** *Merops apiaster* at Horton Kirby (Kent) on 3rd and Dungeness on 7th, and three at Holme at the end of the month, and a **Hoopoe** *Upupa epops* at Driffield (Humberside) on 14th.

### Latest news

The first half of August saw the following: **Semipalmated Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla* at Minsmere; **Temminck's Stint** *C. temminckii* at Titchwell; **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* at Pitsford Reservoir (Northamptonshire); **Long-billed Dowitcher** on Moulton Marshes (Lincolnshire); **Spotted Sandpiper** near Burnley (Lancashire); **Pomarine Skuas** *Stercorarius pomarinus* and one **Long-tailed Skua** *S. longicaudus* around Blakeney (Norfolk); **Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* at Dungeness; and last, but not least—seen during a pelagic boat trip somewhere off the southwest of Cornwall—a **Wilson's Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus*.



## Note

**Identification problems with immature Citrine Wagtails** I was interested to read the note on head pattern of immature Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* by A. Brown and P. R. Gordon (*Brit. Birds* 78: 196). During the course of ringing at Haigam Rakh, Kashmir, India, in the autumn of 1984, a total of 170 Citrine Wagtails was caught. The range of plumage was considerable. The birds included adults in and after autumn moult, and immatures in and after post-juvenile moult. Several points emerged concerning the immatures. I agree with Brown & Gordon's caveat concerning the variability of the facial pattern. Plate 256 shows the clear, complete pale surround to the dark ear-coverts and plate 257 a less-obvious surround. Both birds were in full first-winter plumage, having completed their post-juvenile moult. Plate 256 also shows that the dark line bordering the supercilium above the eye (often quoted as a mark of Citrine) can be lacking on some first-winter individuals, while plates 256, 257, 258 & 260 show the variable extent of other Citrine features: the pale forehead and the 'hollow-centred' ear-coverts.



256. First-winter Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, India, September 1984 (Peter F. Burns)

257. First-winter Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, India, September 1984 (Peter F. Burns)



Svensson (1984, *Identification Guide to European Passerines*) stated that yellow feathers do not appear on immatures until late October to December. In the field, this could lead to the assumption that the presence of yellowish feathers in early autumn automatically indicates an adult. This

[The inclusion of colour plates 256-261 was subsidised by ZEISS West Germany]





258. Juvenile Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* moulting to first-winter plumage, India, September 1984 (Peter F. Burns)

259. First-winter Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, India, September 1984 (Peter F. Burns)



is not necessarily so, as several birds had some yellowish tones (actually yellowish-buff) in the forehead and anterior part of the supercilium by late September (also shown in plate 256).

The third point concerns juveniles before completion of their post-juvenile moult which, especially in the field rather than in the hand, give the impression of being brown above (plates 258 & 260 of the same bird), not

grey like first-winters. This is particularly noticeable on the back, rump and uppertail-coverts, where the retained juvenile feathers are dark brown with paler brown fringes (plate 258).

Finally, it should be noted that adult winter and first-winter plumages *can* be remarkably similar. In the field, some may be separated under favourable conditions by reference to the greater and median coverts. On first-winters, these retained juvenile feathers have clear, broad white tips



260. Juvenile Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* moulting to first-winter plumage, India, September 1984 (Peter F. Burns)

261. Adult winter Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, India, September 1984 (Peter F. Burns)





sharply demarcated from the dark remainder of the feathers (plate 259). On winter adults, the tips are pale buff and are less clearly demarcated from the rest of the feather (plate 261).

I should like to thank Derek Reed of the British Museum (Natural History), Tring, for his help.

PETER F. BURNS

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## Monthly marathon

**262.** 'Monthly marathon' competition. Photograph number 3. Identify this species. If you succeed with ten in a row, you could win a SUNBIRD holiday to North America, Africa or Southeast Asia (see rules on page 364 in July issue). Send your answer *on a postcard* to British Birds Editorial Office (Monthly marathon, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK43 3NJ) to arrive *by 15th October 1986*.







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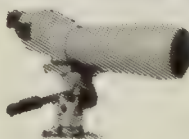
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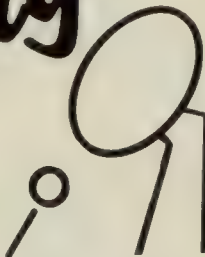
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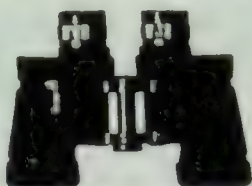
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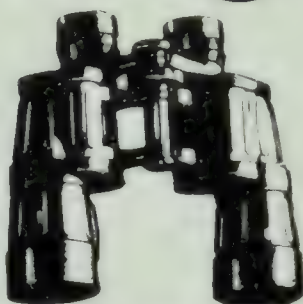
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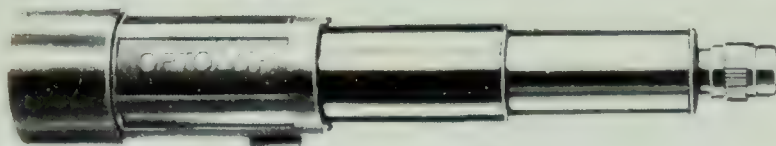


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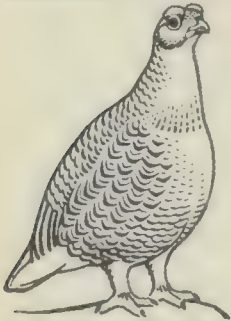
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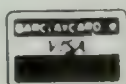
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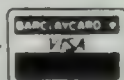
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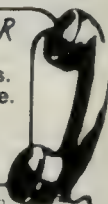
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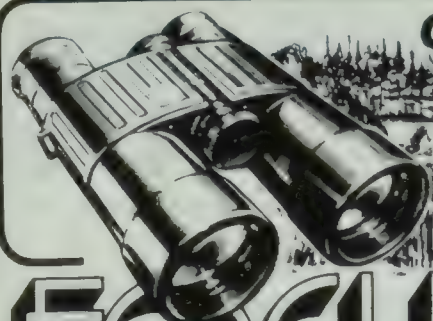
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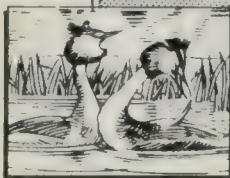


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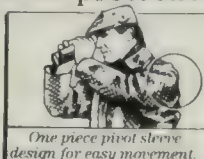
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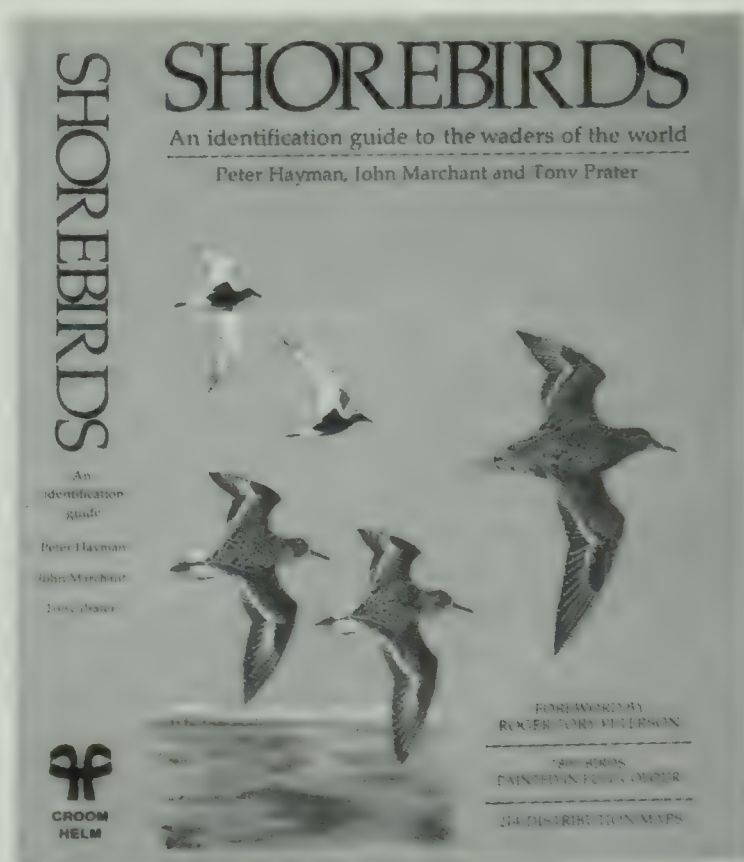
VOLUME 79 NUMBER 10 OCTOBER 1986

## The 'British Birds' Best Bird Book of the Year



**F**or the benefit of those who may wish to acquire (or give as a present) just one of the many bird books published each year, *British Birds* selects annually its choice of the 'Best Bird Book of the Year' from those reviewed in the journal during the previous 12 months. The winner may, in one year, be an important, erudite scientific treatise and, in another, a lighter, less academic work, but it will always be reliable, well produced and thoroughly worthy of inclusion in any birdwatcher's library.

Our choice for BEST BIRD BOOK OF 1986 is  
**Shorebirds: an identification guide to the waders of the world.** By Peter Hayman, John Marchant and Tony Prater. Croom Helm. £19.95. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 454-455)







# Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 1984

*Compiled by Robert Spencer and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel*

**T**his is the twelfth annual report published by the Panel. In the eleventh report, for 1983 (*Brit. Birds* 79: 53-81), we introduced some changes in presentation, the most fundamental of which was the adoption of regions in order to give greater concealment to the more vulnerable species and yet to offer a better geographical picture of distribution. In doing so, we wrote 'The reactions of county recorders and of readers will help to determine whether it is a once-only experiment or, broadly speaking, the basis of a pattern for several years to come'. We had only a moderate response to that invitation to comment, but all who did take the trouble to write welcomed the changes. We are grateful for this encouragement and gratified, too, by the fine co-operation we have received from county recorders. The reader who cares to compare this report with its predecessor will find that for some species—Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis* is a good example—we have been enabled to present a much fuller picture.

In the presentation of this report for 1984, we have made only one significant change, and that is to the summary tables. Hitherto, the total of 'possible' breeders also included all pairs which had been proved to breed, and for some readers this gave an inflated estimate of population size. We now therefore give two separate figures for proved and possible breeders, labelled 'confirmed (pairs)' and 'possible (pairs)' respectively and have

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The publication of this report has been subsidised by a donation from the RSPB.

then added a line 'Max. total (pairs)', the meaning of which is self-explanatory. The 'possible' category has always been (and remains) a broad one. It ranges from pairs keeping together throughout the breeding season, but still providing no concrete evidence of breeding, to a single bird seen on one day in the breeding season in a habitat judged suitable for breeding. It is the inclusion of records in this last category which sometimes attracts criticism. Some such birds undoubtedly are late passage migrants, or displaced; others really are potential colonists or their vanguard. In the absence of a ready way of distinguishing between the two categories, it is safer to list them all: the important thing is to be as consistent as possible. Who can deny that the lone male Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophrys* which summers year after year with a colony of Gannets *Sula bassana* lacks only a mate to become a British breeding bird?

It has been suggested to us that we should define what we mean by a 'rare breeding bird'. The attempt to do so has given us much interesting debate and has helped to clear our thoughts. Our conclusion is that we need information about all species (other than wholly feral ones, such as Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*) which have a breeding population of fewer than 300 pairs. Let us acknowledge immediately that at present we fall short of this aim, and it will perhaps be helpful to list the three types of exception we have made.

1. There are species whose numbers fluctuate widely, dropping well below the ceiling of 300 after severe winters, but perhaps almost doubling for a short time after favourable winters and breeding seasons. The Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata* is a prime example. We think it sensible to be on the safe side and include such species, especially if the habitat which they prefer is at all threatened.

2. At present we omit some species from our list on grounds of practicability. For example, there are fewer than 150 pairs of Black-throated Divers *Gavia arctica* in Scotland, but we know that the numbers reported through the county network reflect varying amounts of fieldwork rather than population changes. For such species we believe that a system of 'core-sampling'—a kind of Rare Breeding Birds Census—should be adopted. By this means, the same carefully chosen sample of localities could be checked each year, with the aim of measuring population changes. Species which may perhaps be best dealt with by standard sampling techniques include Black-throated Diver, Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*, Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*, Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*, Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus* and Snow Bunting. We are in the process of establishing such sample censuses.

3. As distinct from the physical problems of censusing common to the species in section two, above, there may be 'psychological' problems, typified by the Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*. It calls for a very special degree of dedication to walk the streets of industrial suburbs birdwatching, and even more so when it has to be done early in the morning to minimise the roar of traffic, or to obtain permission to visit power stations or other industrial complexes. To expect people to do this annually is unrealistic, so perhaps a comprehensive survey every—say—five years would be a better approach. Elsewhere, in habitats more congenial to bird-watchers, we can rely on the normal network of observers to pass data to their local recorders and, through them, to the Panel.

It is always difficult to fit the infinite variety of nature into the rigid categories conceived by mankind. Nowhere is this more true in the Panel's work than in the concept of a breeding locality or site. A discrete reedbed



with several pairs of Savi's Warblers *Locustella luscinioides* is clearly one site or locality, as is a loch with ten pairs of grebes. But decisions become somewhat arbitrary with Cetti's Warblers *Cettia cetti* spread thinly along 50 km of riverside habitat. Again, a Surrey heath with Dartford Warblers is discrete (so clearly a single locality), but we have treated the whole of the New Forest similarly. We acknowledge that, in this report (and in previous ones), there is some inconsistency in this respect, partly because of the difficulty of interpreting, without detailed local knowledge, the data submitted by observers or recorders.

By publishing two reports in the space of a calendar year, the Panel has caught up. We hope that from now on we shall be able to adhere to a timetable of regular publication each February, but this will depend on recorders being able to submit their forms by late July, and they in turn will be dependent upon the promptness of observers. At the time of writing (mid June 1986), barely half the forms for 1985 have reached the Panel. We are aware of the time-consuming demands which we make on recorders and are profoundly grateful for the painstaking co-operation which we receive from the great majority of them. We hope gradually to win the support of those who still have lingering doubts about offering their wholehearted allegiance.

We see the Panel's role as becoming practical rather than academic. In this context, we may mention that, at a recent public enquiry concerning proposals to develop the breeding site of a rare bird, the Panel was called upon to put into national perspective the rarity of the bird in question. This it was able to do without even naming any counties. More such cases will arise in the future, and it is important that the Panel's files should be as complete as possible.

During 1984, the membership of the Panel remained unchanged, namely Dr L. A. Batten, R. H. Dennis, Ian Prestt, Dr J. T. R. Sharrock and Robert Spencer (secretary). As noted in our last report (*Brit. Birds* 79: 56), Richard Porter succeeded Ian Prestt in 1985, and was much involved with data collection and report presentation for both the 1983 report and this 1984 report. Whilst the work of the Panel is sponsored by the NCC, the RSPB, the BTO and *British Birds*, the Panel is autonomous. Its members are appointed in a personal capacity, albeit with a specialised knowledge of the interests and requirements of the sponsoring bodies.

## The year 1984

Like most years, 1984 was one in which some rare species prospered, some fared poorly, and many performed more or less within the limits which we have come to expect. One pair of the introduced White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* reached egg stage, but failed to hatch them, whilst the probably native, spinster Snowy Owls *Nyctea scandiaca* this year did not bother to lay their unfertilised eggs. The Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, which has several times been suspected of breeding, finally did so, and to the accompanying publicity of television cameras. Television almost managed to capture moments in the life of a River Warbler *Locustella*

*fluviatilis* sequestering in East Anglia. It is interesting to think that its precise location must have become known to hundreds if not thousands, although in the Panel's files it has no more than the name of a county at the head of the record sheet. Another unexpected visitor, which probably stayed the entire summer and was seen displaying, was a Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*. Both the warbler and the snipe were lone individuals, but it is not impossible that these species might breed here in some future year.

For some species, such as Pintail *Anas acuta* and Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, rain and flooding interfered with breeding. Elsewhere, the egg thieves were again busy with their unwholesome activities. Although the two pairs of Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* to lay eggs were feral, they both had them stolen. Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* and Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* were once again the victims of nest robbers. It is difficult to assess the long-term influence of these year-by-year thefts, but morally the perpetrators are helping themselves to part of the national heritage as much as if they were to remove a stone from Stonehenge.

The Woodlark *Lullula arborea* is the latest, sad, addition to the Panel's list, prompted by an all-too-evident decline, but the response from observers and recorders has been gratifying and we have been able to publish information from nine counties. It will be several years before population trends become clear.

Amongst the species which occupied additional localities in 1984, Goldeneyes *Bucephala clangula* are still responding well to the provision of nest-boxes; Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* are slowly breaking away from the tight confines of their original colonies at Havergate and Minsmere; Cetti's Warblers appear to be doing some 'infilling', as distinct from range expansion; whilst Marsh Warblers *Acrocephalus palustris* are perhaps on the threshold of establishing a genuine secondary breeding area. Time will tell.

### Key to geographical regions used in this report

**Northern Ireland** Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, Tyrone

**England, SW** Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Isles of Scilly, Somerset, Wiltshire

**England, SE** Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Greater London, Hertfordshire, Kent, Middlesex, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Sussex (East and West)

**England, E** Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Lincolnshire and South Humberside, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Suffolk

**England, Central** Derbyshire, Herefordshire, Leicestershire (with Rutland), Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire (West Midlands, in the new county structure), Worcestershire

**England, N** Cheshire, Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Greater Manchester, Isle of Man, Lancashire, Merseyside, Northumberland, North Humberside, Tyne & Wear, Yorkshire (North, South and West)

**Wales** All present-day counties (i.e. includes the former Monmouth)

**Scotland, S** The former counties of Ayrshire, Berwickshire, Dumfriesshire, Kirkcudbrightshire, Lanarkshire, Lothian (East, Mid and West), Peeblesshire, Renfrewshire, Roxburghshire, Selkirkshire, Wigtownshire

**Scotland, Mid** Aberdeenshire, Angus, Banffshire, Clackmannanshire, Dunbartonshire, Fife, Kincardineshire, Kinross, Moray, Nairn, Perthshire, Stirlingshire

**Scotland, N & W** Argyllshire, Bute, Caithness, Inverness-shire, Orkney, Ross and Cromarty, Shetland, Sutherland, Western Isles (Outer Hebrides)



Systematic list

We have received no relevant 1984 records for the following species:

Great Northern Diver <i>Gavia immer</i>	Spotted Sandpiper <i>Actitis macularia</i>
Little Shearwater <i>Puffinus assimilis</i>	Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>	Little Gull <i>Larus minutus</i>
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	Glaucous Gull <i>L. hyperboreus</i>
Scaup <i>Aythya marila</i>	Black Tern <i>Chlidonias niger</i>
King Eider <i>Somateria spectabilis</i>	Bee-eater <i>Merops apiaster</i>
Long-tailed Duck <i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	Shore Lark <i>Eremophila alpestris</i>
Smew <i>Mergus albellus</i>	Citrine Wagtail <i>Motacilla citreola</i>
Honey Buzzard <i>Pernis apivorus</i>	Bluethroat <i>Luscinia svecica</i>
Rough-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo lagopus</i>	Great Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>
Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Short-toed Treecreeper <i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Great Grey Shrike <i>Lanius excubitor</i>
Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>	Lapland Bunting <i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>
Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i>	

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

One locality: one individual.

**Scotland, S** One locality: adult in breeding plumage from 3rd May to 6th June. This species has frequented site in question for several consecutive springs.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	1	2	5	2	0	1	3	3	2	2	1
No. individuals	1	2	5	2	0	1	4	2	2	3	1
No. pairs	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0

Observations in recent years have suggested a real possibility of the species breeding at this site.

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

26 localities: 39-60 pairs breeding.

**Scotland, Mid** Two localities.

**MORAYSHIRE** Two localities: (1) five pairs on 19th May, but only one young reared to mid July; (2) one adult on 6th May.

**Scotland, N & W** 24 localities.

**INVERNESS-SHIRE** 24 localities: (1)-(24) a total of 55 pairs, 34 of which are known to have reared total of 19 or 20 young.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	25	23	23	15	18	27	36	35	25	44	26
Confirmed (pairs)	58	54	70	42	37	58	53	52	51	41	39
Possible (pairs)	5	12	5	9	18	19	27	19	8	38	21
Max. total (pairs)	63	66	75	51	55	77	80	71	59	79	60

The number of pairs reported is greatly influenced by the number of waters visited and by the timing of those visits. Fewer waters were surveyed in 1984 than in 1983, and there is no reason to suspect any significant decline.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

15 localities: 16-28 pairs breeding.

**England, SE** Four localities, involving two counties: (1) one from 8th July to 6th August; (2) one on 26th July; (3) pair, from 5th to 8th June, may have been present during the two previous weeks; (4) one from 5th to 7th May, two from 8th to 30th May and again on 10th to 11th June, one from 21st to 25th June; up to three juveniles throughout 2nd to 31st August.

**England, E** Four localities in one county: (1) pair in breeding plumage on 29th and 30th March; (2) pair displaying on 25th April; (3) two adults in breeding plumage on 14th May; (4) pair in breeding plumage from 6th to 9th June, copulation observed on the first date and an immature noted on 13th July. Two of the localities could have involved the same birds.

**England, Central** One locality: pair in early June built probable nesting platforms and copulated; for a while, female presumed to be sitting, but both birds reappeared and the site was then deserted.

**England, N** Three localities, involving two counties: (1) pair nested, two downy chicks being first seen on 11th July; (2) two adults, presumed to be pair, in fading breeding plumage on 22nd August; (3) at least ten pairs reared nine first broods comprising minimum of 26 young. Nine of the pairs had second broods and produced a further 18 young.

**Scotland, Mid** Three localities involving two counties: (1) three adults, each with one small chick, one adult with a larger chick and two juveniles, and a further three adults (one in winter plumage), all on 10th August; (2) single adult present throughout breeding season; (3) pair on 2nd May and single on 2nd July.

**1983 Scotland, Mid** Second locality: (2) at least eight adults and possibly up to six pairs; one juvenile seen later.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	2	4	2	7	6	6	9	7	12	19	15
Confirmed (pairs)	15	2	10	11	13	12	11	5	11	11	16
Possible (pairs)	3	9	1	5	2	2	10	7	10	21	12
Max. total (pairs)	18	11	11	16	15	14	21	12	21	32	28

The table indicates a slow increase in the breeding population, and it is gratifying that at least 51 young were reared, compared with 36 in 1983. On the other hand, this encouraging position is much influenced by one thriving population, and the birds at two localities are threatened by recreational activities.

**Black-browed Albatross** *Diomedea melanophris*  
One locality: one summered with Gannets *Sula bassana*.

**Scotland, N & W** One locality.  
SHETLAND One locality: adult in colony from 27th February to 7th October.

This was the thirteenth year that this albatross has summered with the breeding Gannets.

**Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*  
18 localities: at least 36 booming males.

**England, SE and E** 15 localities, of which 11 were in Norfolk: (1) singles seen on 6th and 20th April and one booming on 6th May; (2)(3) two booming at each locality; (3)-(11) singles booming at each locality, one pair known to have bred successfully; (12)(13) four pairs bred at each; (14) five booming males, and breeding thought probable; (15) one in suitable breeding habitat on 28th June.

**England, N** One locality: 11 booming.  
**Wales** Two localities: (1)(2) singles booming at each.

**1983 England, SE and E** Revised information and three additional localities: (3) ten pairs, one known to have reared two young; (14)-(16) two pairs at each.

	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	18	17	21	19	16	15	18	18
Confirmed (pairs)	0	2	1	4	1	1	1	5
Booming males	43	47	51	48	47	35	44-45	36

This species was not added to our list until 1977.





**Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus*  
One locality: pair breeding.  
**England, N** One locality, pair present for some time, and on 29th July male observed to feed a chick which, although of adult size, still had a downy head.  
Although breeding has been suspected on a number of occasions, this constitutes the first proved record this century.

**Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus*  
Two localities: two feral pairs.  
**England, N** One locality.  
GREATER MANCHESTER One locality: feral pair, whose eggs were stolen.  
**Scotland, Mid** One locality.  
DUNBARTONSHIRE One locality: feral pair nested and had four eggs on 23rd May; nest empty on 29th May, and eggs presumed to have been stolen. Including the breeding pair, six individuals summered at this locality.

**Black Duck** *Anas rubripes*  
One locality: male mated with female Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*.  
**Wales** One locality.  
GWYNEDD One locality: male present until 18th December and hybrids seen as follows: three on 23rd February, two on 16th March, eight on 16th September and two on 18th December.

**Pintail** *Anas acuta*  
14 localities: five to 17 pairs breeding.  
**England, SW** One locality.  
DORSET One locality: single males on 1st May and 28th June.  
**England, SE** Three localities.  
KENT Three localities: (1) pair on 22nd May; (2) two males on 2nd May; (3) one to three individuals throughout May and a male throughout June and July.  
**England, E** One locality.  
CAMBRIDGESHIRE One locality: female giving distraction display was almost certainly on eggs, but was probably flooded out in late May.  
**Scotland, N & W** Nine localities.  
INVERNESS-SHIRE One locality: pair possibly bred.  
WESTERN ISLES Two localities: (1) pair possibly bred; (2) pair raised nine young, first seen when newly hatched, and again when fully grown on 30th July.  
ORKNEY Six localities: (1) two or three pairs bred, juveniles being seen in July and August; (2) pair present in May; (3) two pairs bred, broods of two and four on 26th June; (4)(5) single pairs in May; (6) pair in March and April, and juveniles in September.

**1983 England, E** Fifth locality.  
1983 SUFFOLK One locality: pair summered, but no evidence of breeding obtained.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	7	11	10	15	10	19	15	16	18	22	14
Confirmed (pairs)	10	12	6	10	7	10	9	8	7	12	5
Possible (pairs)	1	13	10	16	16	31	16	23	25	15	12
Max. total (pairs)	11	25	16	26	23	41	25	31	32	27	17

Although all the totals are lower than for 1983, there is no reason to suppose that the Pintail is declining as a breeding species. Part of the variation arises from variation in observer cover.

### **Garganey** *Anas querquedula*

45 localities: four to 56 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** Four localities.

AVON One locality: three males and one female on 15th May, two males and a female remaining until 10th June; two records of singles in July, then ones and twos from 16th August to 9th September.

CORNWALL One locality: male from 13th May to 1st June.

DEVON Two localities: (1) male on 8th April and 10th May and pair from 1st June to 16th July, but no evidence of breeding; (2) male on 17th March and pair on 6th May. Males seen briefly at six other localities were all judged to be on passage.

**England, SE** Six localities.

ESSEX One locality: pair, no dates supplied, but breeding thought 'possible'.

KENT Five localities: (1) male on several dates between 5th and 31st May, 1st and 22nd June, and on 29th July; (2) pair on 19th May and single on 21st June; (3) pairs on 14th May, 3rd and 6th June and 4th July, it is possible that two pairs attempted breeding, but only one of them is thought likely to have produced young; (4) single male from 3rd to 18th May and on 13th June, two individuals on 1st July, and male from 6th to 9th July; (5) male from 5th to 9th May and on 20th and 23rd June.

**England, E** 27 localities.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE Four localities: (1) maximum of ten males in mid May, two broods observed, and one nest with 11 eggs flooded out; (2) two pairs, one of which hatched brood of five; (3) one or two on various dates between 22nd March and 8th April; (4) male on 4th and 30th May.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE One locality: pair in suitable breeding habitat from 1st to 7th May, but not seen subsequently.

LINCOLNSHIRE/SOUTH HUMBERSIDE One locality: female acting in agitated manner and returning frequently to the same spot in the reed edge, present from 30th June to 5th July.

NORFOLK 17 localities: (1)-(17) from one to six individuals reported from each of these localities, and breeding probable at one of them.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE Three localities: (1) male from 17th April to 12th June and two females on 19th April only; (2) pair on 24th April only; (3) pair from 15th to 19th May.

SUFFOLK One locality: pair summered in suitable breeding habitat, but showed no evidence of breeding.

**England, N** Seven localities.

CHESHIRE Three localities: (1) pair on 11th April, a male on 13th May and from 8th to 10th June; (2) pair on 11th May and five immatures on nearby river from 4th to 11th September; (3) male from 19th to 25th April.

GREATER MANCHESTER One locality: pair from 28th April to early May, two males in late May and one on 3rd June.

LANCASHIRE Two localities: (1) male on 2nd and 3rd May, female on 17th May, male on 3rd June, singles on three days in July, 12 days in August, and on 2nd September; (2) pair from 13th April into June, the female remaining until 5th July, breeding attempt suspected, but no young seen.

WEST YORKSHIRE One locality: pair suspected of breeding.

**Scotland, S** One locality.

EAST LOTHIAN One locality: pair from 30th April to 9th May.

**1983 England, E** Revised total, 29 sites.

1983 SUFFOLK Three localities: (1) revised information: one or two pairs, one pair hatched at least five young and reared at least four; (2) pair bred, but success unknown; (3) male present on 29th May could have been breeding locally.



	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	34	48	66	59	45
Confirmed (pairs)	4	8	10	15	4
Possible (pairs)	50	50	84	51	52
Max. total (pairs)	54	58	94	66	56

For those duck species which spend much time in small reed-enclosed waters, breeding can be difficult to prove. This is a species whose numbers do tend to fluctuate considerably from year to year, and 1984 could be regarded as about average. This species was not added to our list until 1980.

**Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra*

Nine localities: 17-67 pairs breeding.

**Northern Ireland** One locality.

FERMANAGH One locality: a maximum of 46 potential breeding pairs, with minimum productivity of 36 young hatched from seven clutches.

**Scotland, Mid** Three localities.

DUNBARTONSHIRE/STIRLINGSHIRE One locality: an early-morning census on 29th May indicated six pairs and two additional males. There were no subsequent reports of young.

PERTSHIRE Two localities: (1) three pairs on 6th May, female with three young on 15th July and again on 26th July; (2) pair on 6th May.

**Scotland, N & W** Five localities.

ARGYLL One locality: female seen with two young on 6th August.

INVERNESS-SHIRE Two localities: (1) three pairs on 25th May and on 8th June, female with six ducklings and six other females on 4th July, three females with broods and four other females on 13th July, three females with broods of seven, six and three on 16th July; (2) clutch of nine with the female on the nest on 5th June, and nests with clutches of eight and ten on 13th June.

ROSS-SHIRE One locality: female with five small young (no date given).

SUTHERLAND One locality: male and two females seen on 2nd May.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	13	12	14	13	9	17	10	6	17	6	9
Confirmed (pairs)	10	32	22	24	16	98	7	5	14	10	17
Possible (pairs)	132	127	137	132	125	30	106	77	98	75	50
Max. total (pairs)	142	159	159	156	141	128	113	82	112	85	67

The reports suggest a decline in some key localities, but it is certain that in Scotland an unknown number of pairs escape detection every year. Scoters riding out on choppy water may be very difficult to see from the shore.

**Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula*

Five localities: 53-56 pairs breeding.

**England, SE** One locality.

ESSEX One locality: three summered.

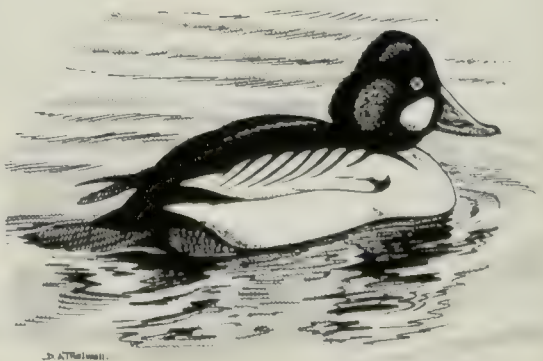
**England, N** One locality.

LANCASHIRE One locality: pair on 25th May.

**Scotland, S** One locality.

MID/WEST LOTHIAN One locality: male present from 29th April to 18th August and female seen in association on 1st June, 7th and 13th August.

**Scotland, N & W** Total of 53 clutches laid, of which 34 were successfully incubated to pro-



duce a record total of 311 young. A significant and encouraging development was the occupation of two nest boxes about 48 km away from the river system where most of the boxes are located.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	5	3	8	12	18	17	11	13	11	11	5
Confirmed (pairs)	3	3	5	6	12	22	26	29	27	47	53
Possible (pairs)	4	3	7	8	15	21	11	25	30	9	3
Max. total (pairs)	7	6	12	14	27	43	37	54	57	56	56
Young hatched	19	10	46	11	40	110	165	286	220	209	311

In Scotland, breeding has arbitrarily been regarded as occurring in two localities. This is perhaps less misleading than regarding each nest as being in a separate locality. The systematic collection and publication of late-spring and summer records would be impossible in Scotland, but the Panel is anxious to receive all such records for England, Wales and Northern Ireland in the belief that they could be precursors of spreading breeding populations.

**Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*

No records were submitted to the Panel, but it is known that breeding or attempted breeding occurred in at least four localities in Britain.

**Red Kite** *Milvus milvus*

46 pairs, 33 breeding, only 13 successful, rearing 21 young.

**Wales** 46 pairs known: 21 young reared. Of the known pairs, 33 laid eggs—the same figures as in 1983. Only 13 nests were successful, with six broods of one, six broods of two, and one of three. Of the 13 unsuccessful or non-breeding pairs located, eight built or repaired nests, and one or two of these could have laid and failed quickly. In addition, at least 26 unmated individuals were identified in April, giving a known population of at least 118 individuals, or about ten more than in 1983. Of the known failures, three were robbed of eggs, one nest collapsed, one female died at the nest, two clutches were probably taken by Carrion Crows *Corvus corone* or Ravens *C. corax*, three clutches failed to hatch after full-term incubation, six others failed about, or soon after, the expected hatch date, and four nests definitely lost small young, grey squirrels *Sciurus carolinensis* and polecats *Mustela putorius* being implicated at two. (The Panel is indebted to Peter Davis and the Kite Committee for this detailed summary.)

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Total pairs	32	32	36	34	39	42	42	46	47	46	46
Breeding pairs	27	28	29	28	32	30	29	32	38	33	33
Successful pairs	9	15	15	12	13	14	21	18	19	21	13
Young reared	12	24	18	17	22	18	27	21	23	24	21

But for the good productivity of those pairs which were successful, 1984 would have been a very poor year. The potential for further growth and the colonisation of areas outside Wales is still there, but the report from the Kite Committee gives a valuable insight into the range of problems which beset breeding Red Kites.

**White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla*

The project to reintroduce this species to Scotland continued in 1984, when ten young were imported from Norway and successfully released on Rhum National Nature Reserve by the Nature Conservancy Council. White-tailed Eagles were found in seven suitable breeding sites in western



Scotland, and two pairs laid eggs, but both failed. The trio which laid eggs in 1983, a male and two females, were present at the 1983 nest, but did not breed. (The Panel is grateful to John A. Love for preparing this statement.)

### **Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*

28 localities: 66 young reared.

A total of 66 young was reared from 28 nests, 18 of the males being monogamous and five bigamous. Once again, the bulk of the population was in Norfolk and Suffolk, where 61 young were reared. Two pairs nested elsewhere and reared five young. Four nests failed, one probably due to human disturbance and an egg-collector, the other three for unknown reasons. At one nest, the male disappeared just before the eggs were due to hatch, but the female reared three young with the help of food put out by observers. The mean productivity was 2.36 young per nest, just slightly lower than the 1983 figure of 2.56. Two nests were in arable crops, and the remainder in reeds. At least eight other individuals summered and a colour-ringed juvenile from 1983 was seen briefly. (The Panel is indebted to John Day, who compiled this report, making use of his personal files to amplify the data submitted to the Panel.)

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Breeding males	4	5	11	13	14	11	16	17	19	21	27
Breeding females	5	7	11	15	14	16	20	20	24	28	32
Fledged young	7	18	27	44	36	38	44	48	59	71	66
Mean fledged young per nest	1.4	2.6	2.4	2.9	2.6	2.4	2.2	2.0	2.5	2.5	2.4

### **Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus*

Two localities involving two counties: three young fledged.

**England, SW and E** Two localities: (1) pair present in the breeding season; (2) pair nested in an arable crop, but failed when heavy rain flattened the crop across the nest, which contained five eggs, the female remated with a different male and successfully reared three young from a nest in the same field. (This statement was compiled by John Day.)

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	3	3	4	2	7	4	8	8	7	8	2
Confirmed (pairs)	0	0	3	1	2	2	2	2	3	6	1
Possible (pairs)	3	3	2	1	5	2	6	7	5	4	1
Max. total (pairs)	3	3	5	2	7	4	8	9	8	10	2
Fledged young	0	0	6	0	3	7	4	4	4	9	3

After several years of improving numbers, 1984 marks a setback, only the successful rearing of young putting it above the worst recent year (1977).

### **Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis*

61 localities: 29-68 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** 16 localities: (1) female in suitable habitat on 10th April; (2)-(12) six pairs which, between them, reared 17 young to flying stage, and further five pairs which probably bred; (13)-(16) singles, mainly females, on various dates between March and July.

**England, SE** Two localities: (1) female carrying food into a wood on 26th June; (2) pair frequenting wood.

**England, E** Nine localities: (1) pair from 8th April; (2) pair from 1st May (possibility of these being the same as those at locality 1 not fully precluded); (3) pair from 21st April; (4) male from 12th May, female on 29th May, pair from 3rd June, two males and possibly two females on 15th June; (5) male on 12th April, two males and female on 13th April (possibility of some overlap with those at locality 4); (6) male on 10th May and 12th June; (7) female on 22nd April, male on 21st June and pair from 24th June onwards, frequenting two different woods; (8) pair

displaying on 15th April and 19th May; (9) pair on 19th April, female on 24th April and male on 19th May.

**England, Central** Three localities: (1) female on 3rd and 15th April, single males on seven dates between 14th and 29th April, two males on 20th and 22nd April; (2) pair on 9th June, female still present on 1st September; (3) three, thought to be a male and two females, present throughout year.

**England, N** 16 localities: (1) empty nest with recently fledged young nearby on 7th August; (2)-(15) 14 nests known, only three of which successful, rearing nine young; of remaining nests, nine robbed or otherwise interfered with by man, and two deserted; (6) male on 28th May.

**Wales** Four localities: (1) two pairs, rearing broods of two and four; (2) two pairs, rearing broods of three and four; (3) one or two individuals, up to 20th April, and again on 29th July; (4) three pairs, but no proof of breeding.

**Scotland, S** Nine localities: (1) two pairs, one of which reared brood; (2)(3) single pairs, each of which reared brood; (4) pair possibly reared young; (5)(6) two pairs at each, but breeding status not known; (7) two, or possibly three pairs, but breeding status not known; (8) minimum of 12 sightings, thought to represent one or two pairs; (9) pair soaring in April.

**Scotland, Mid** One locality: pair displaying on 15th and 22nd April.

**Scotland, N & W** One locality: pair reared three young from four eggs hatched.

**1983 England, Central** One additional locality: (6) pair in suitable locality.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Counties	10	14	10	15	18	21	21	27	16	17	21
No. localities	20	32	28	33	37	37	42	50	39	57	61
Confirmed (pairs)	9	5	12	15	14	23	17	15	23	30	29
Possible (pairs)	12	29	16	22	26	21	32	37	18	25	39
Max. total (pairs)	21	34	28	37	40	44	49	52	41	55	68

Except when soaring, the Goshawk is generally very unobtrusive, and easily overlooked in areas of substantial woodland. The table suggests that there is a slow build-up in numbers, and this despite evidence of sustained persecution by the illegal taking of eggs or young.

**Osprey *Pandion haliaetus***

33 localities: 29 pairs reared 47 young; five nests robbed by egg-collectors.

**Scotland, Mid** One locality.

**PERTHSHIRE** Loch of Lowes: male arrived on 20th April and stayed two months, but apparently failed to attract a mate.

**Scotland, N & W** One locality.

**INVERNESS-SHIRE** Loch Garten: pair fledged two young from three eggs.

**Elsewhere in Scotland** 31 pairs: 29 laid eggs and there were 21 successful broods. Three nests failed during incubation, including a case of bigamy with two females on nests about 500 m apart. At fledging, there were three broods of one, ten broods of two, and eight broods of three. (All data compiled by Roy Dennis on behalf of the RSPB.)

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Pairs	14	14	14	20	22	25	25	25	30	30	33
Successful pairs	10	7	10	7	11	16	19	20	21	20	21
Young reared	20	16	20	13	19	30	41	42	45	45	47

Although 1984 was a record year for the number of young reared, the theft of five clutches of eggs must slow down the rate of future increase and expansion of the population.

**Hobby *Falco subbuteo***

214 localities: 93-209 pairs reared at least 93 young.

**England, SW** 28-76 pairs, rearing at least 40 young.



**AVON** Six localities: (1) many records of one, sometimes two individuals; (2) four sightings of pair by 10th June, then singles on 9th July, 23rd August and 4th September; (3) singles on 21st May, 13th June and three dates in July and August, and two on 5th September; (4) single on 9th August and injured male on 19th August; (5) singles on 22nd July and 1st September; (6) singles on 4th May, 3rd June, 26th July and 10th September.

**DEVON** One locality: one possible pair. Information about other pairs in county not yet available.

**DORSET** 18 localities: (1)-(18) single pairs, of which 15 reared total of 35 young, one nest robbed, and two pairs failed.

**HAMPSHIRE** 16 localities: (1)-(16) five pairs known to have bred, rearing at least nine young; most of remainder thought to be probable breeders, but picture for county regarded as very incomplete.

**GLOUCESTERSHIRE** Four localities: (1) one or two pairs, one flying juvenile; (2) several sightings during summer; (3) up to three in May, two adults and juvenile in September; (4) several sightings between June and September.

**SOMERSET** 18 localities: (1) pair reared two young; (2)-(5) pairs in May or June; (6) one or two between 11th and 25th June, and again on 15th August; (7)-(14) singles on more than one date during breeding season, 'regularly' at two localities; (15)-(18) single sightings.

**WILTSHIRE** 20 localities: (1)-(4) one pair confirmed breeding at each site, with total of at least three young reared; (5)-(8) pairs or individuals present during breeding season in circumstances suggestive of breeding; (9)-(20) one or more sightings during breeding season in habitats suitable for breeding.

**England, SE** 50-92 pairs, rearing at least 27 young.

**BERKSHIRE** Five localities: (1) seen on eight dates May-July; (2)-(5) seen on two or more dates during breeding season.

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE** 40 localities: (1)-(26) breeding proved, but no information received about breeding success; (27)-(34) pairs seen regularly, but without proof of breeding; (35)-(40) other sightings during breeding season, in areas suitable for breeding.

**KENT** Three localities: (1)(2) pattern of records suggestive of territory holding; (3) pair behaving territorially in May, two in early August, food-passing, last seen on 7th September.

**ESSEX** One locality: pair reared two young.

**HERTFORDSHIRE** 13 localities: (1) pair, with two or possibly three young on 22nd August; (2) single in previous breeding territory on 2nd and 3rd June; (3) one or two all summer and juvenile in September; (4) pair on 19th July; (5)(6) regular sightings over at least a month; (7)-(13) singles on one or more occasions during breeding season.

**OXFORDSHIRE** Six localities: (1)-(6) six nests found, 'probably a small proportion of the real total for the county'.

**SURREY** 16 localities: (1) nest with three eggs, from which three young fledged; (2)-(4) nests with three young, each fledging at least two; (5) a nest with four eggs from which some young fledged; (6)(7) nests with three eggs, from which some young fledged; (8) nest with three young; (9) nest with two eggs from which both young fledged; (10) nest from which some young fledged; (11)-(13) pairs on more than one occasion in known breeding areas; (14)-(16) singles in known breeding areas.

**SUSSEX** Six localities: (1)-(6) breeding pairs, with total of five to seven young known to have been reared.

**England, E** Eight to 26 pairs, rearing at least 14 young.

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE** Five localities: (1)(2) pairs, rearing one and two young; (3) regular sightings between 10th May and 12th September, with local breeding indicated; (4) single observed carrying food; (5) various sightings but no evidence of breeding. 'Some observers believe that ten or more pairs could be nesting.'

**HUNTINGDONSHIRE** Two localities: (1) pair, present from mid May, fledged two young in first week of August; (2) many sightings from 7th May and seen carrying prey, almost certainly nesting locally, but nest not found.

**LINCOLNSHIRE/SOUTH HUMBERSIDE** Two localities: (1) singles on five dates between 13th May and 9th August; (2) adult on 24th June.

**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE** 14 localities: (1) pair reared two or three young; (2) pair reared at least two young; (3) pair reared two young which fledged on 23rd August; (4) pair reared one young; (5) five on 8th September: probably bred nearby as seen throughout summer; (6)-(11)

pairs during breeding season; (12)-(14) singles throughout summer. Singles seen on odd occasions at 27 other localities, but probably on passage.

SUFFOLK Three localities: (1) pair reared at least two young; (2)(3) pairs probably bred.

**England, Central** Six to 11 pairs, rearing at least 11 young.

DERBYSHIRE Three localities: (1) pair reared three young, still in nest on 12th August, but fledged by 20th; (2)(3) pairs seen, with food-passing at one site, but no evidence of breeding.

HEREFORDSHIRE One locality: one pair bred.

LEICESTERSHIRE Three localities: (1) pair with two young, seen late in August; (2) territorial pair, presumed to be breeding; (3) pair displaying, and carrying food in early August. All three sites on open farmland.

SHROPSHIRE One locality: many sightings, of individuals and pairs, between 28th April and 22nd July, breeding judged probable.

WARWICKSHIRE One locality: pair reared three young. Casual sightings (not available to the Panel) suggest presence of five or six pairs.

WORCESTERSHIRE Two localities: (1) pair reared two young; (2) pair reared one young.

**Wales** One to four pairs, rearing at least one young.

GWENT Three localities: (1) pair fledged at least one young; (2)(3) singles in suitable habitats on 3rd and 16th June respectively.

GWYNEDD One locality: single on 8th July.

**1983 England, SW** Additional information.

1983 GLOUCESTERSHIRE One locality: pair present all summer.

**1983 England, E** Additional information.

1983 SUFFOLK Five localities: (1) single with prey on 18th June and at least five other sightings in June; (2) one hawking for insects on 19th June; (3) single on 10th June; (4) pair displaying on 12th July; (5) juvenile on 24th July.

**1983 England, Central** Additional information.

1983 HEREFORDSHIRE One additional locality: (2) one pair bred.

1983 SHROPSHIRE One locality: pair fledged three young.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Confirmed (pairs)	47	38	59	51	70	80	64	51	97	80	93
Possible (pairs)	49	95	84	68	86	52	91	109	105	182	116
Max. total (pairs)	96	133	143	119	156	132	155	160	202	262	209
Young reared (minimum)	51	42	69	78	96	72	86	89	63	104	93

The reports of Hobbies breeding on open farmland, together with the growing totals for those counties where detailed fieldwork is taking place, suggest that the species is under-recorded and that the increasing totals revealed in the table are in part due to more-thorough survey-work.

**Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana*

Four localities: 0-10 pairs breeding.

**England, E** Three localities: (1) two calling on 31st May and 1st June, three on 3rd June, thereafter one until 14th June, one seen on 3rd August, thought likely to have bred following floods; (2) one calling nightly from 31st May to 14th June; (3) heard calling in suitable habitat on 31st May, but not subsequently.

**Scotland, N & W** One locality: two calling on 15th, 16th and 30th May, three calling on 14th and 27th May, and five calling on 17th and 18th May, but no proof of breeding.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Counties	4	0	1	3	6	2	1	3	1	3	3
No. localities	4	0	2	4	6	4	3	4	2	6	4
Calling males	5	0	2	7	6	8	4	9	3	12	10

A second consecutive year with rather-better-than-average numbers. As



with the Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, detection of the presence of the species is almost totally dependent upon vocalisations.



N.A.

**Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta***

11 localities: 235-240 pairs reared at least 108 young.

**England, SE & E** Eleven localities. The key sites remain Havergate Island, Suffolk, where 117 pairs succeeded in fledging only 47 young, and Minsmere, also Suffolk, where 52 pairs bred, but reared no young at all. Predation, by foxes *Vulpes vulpes*, Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* and Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus*, remains a problem at some sites.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	4	6	5	6	3	3	5	5	9	9	11
Confirmed (pairs)	125	158	151	146	145	147	168	201	190	238	237
Young reared (minima)	64	142	68	14	92	99	101	155	150	192	108

The year 1984 was one of mixed fortunes for the species, with breeding or attempting breeding at more localities than ever, but with poor breeding success.

**Stone-curlew *Burhinus oediconemus***

44 localities: 19-71 pairs breeding, but data known to be incomplete.

**England, SW** 19 localities: (1) five nests known, at all of which young hatched, but nothing known of survival rate; (2) eggs laid in one nest, but outcome unknown; (3) two adults and juvenile seen on 8th August; (4) two pairs present on eggs in May, but outcome unknown; (5) five pairs present in mid April; (6)-(10) pairs present at each in mid April; (11) a pair present in early June; (12) pair present in late May; (13) ten pairs present, but no further details available; (14) pair present; (15) two pairs displaying in April; (16) pair in young plantation; (17) single calling on 18th June; (18) single in late-sown barley on 19th May, previously heard calling on 10th and 11th May; (19) single calling on 27th April.

**England, SE** Eight localities: (1)-(8) total of three to 11 breeding pairs, but only two young known.

**England, E** 18 localities: (1)-(9) nine pairs, at least six of which bred successfully: at one site, adult killed flying into overhead wires; one chick taken by foxes and another was traffic victim; (10)-(13) present, but information too vague to summarise; (14)(15) at least one pair at each; (16) pair; (17) two pairs, one of which reared two or three young; (18) four pairs. It is thought that the true figures could be considerably higher.

**1983 England, E** Eight additional localities: (16)-(23) total of 29 or 30 pairs.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Confirmed (pairs)	28	47	16	4	20	3	8	10	8	20	19
Possible (pairs)	39	25	93	23	14	47	37	43	59	77	52
Max. total (pairs)	67	72	109	27	34	81	45	53	67	98	71

Although the breeding population is thought to be significantly bigger

than the numbers given here suggest, there is ample evidence that the species is increasingly threatened by loss of habitat. As usual, we urge observers with information to send it to the Panel.

**Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus*

Incomplete data.

**England** Five sites: (1) two pairs, each with three eggs, but only one chick hatched; (2) pair with three eggs on 19th May, which had been deserted by 14th June; (3) male with ten-day-old chick on 17th July; (4) female on 26th May; (5) two females on 28th May.

**Scotland** Reports received for five localities: (1) eight on summit not frequented in recent years were judged to be on passage (no date provided); (2) pair; (3) male on nest, male holding territory, and pair, all on 6th July, male and two young on 29th July; (4) two pairs on 26th May; (5) 'breeding about average, but poorer than usual in the east'.

Although woefully incomplete, this is a rather fuller report than we have often been able to publish, and we are grateful for the co-operation we have received. In England, it was an outstanding year for passage Dotterels, and there were more proved breeders than for some years.

**Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii*

One locality: 0-1 breeding pair.

**Scotland, N** One locality: one or two from 19th May to 26th June, with display on 25th May, but breeding not proved.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	2	1	2	3	3	4	5	1	3	1	1
Confirmed (pairs)	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	0
Possible (pairs)	3	2	3	5	5	4	5	1	2	2	1
Max. total (pairs)	3	2	4	5	6	6	6	1	3	2	1

**Purple Sandpiper** *Calidris maritima*

One locality: one or two pairs breeding.

**Scotland, Mid and N** One locality: individuals present from 7th June to 22nd July, adult clearly off a nest on 14th June and calling activity in another area 1 km distant on 19th June, and adult very agitated on 21st July. It is thought that two nesting attempts were made, and that at least one was successful, but it is not known whether there was one, 1½ or two pairs.

There is still no indication of the species spreading far from the original locality where breeding first occurred in 1978.

**Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax*

Six localities: three to six females breeding.

**England, SE** Two localities: (1) up to 13 present in May and June; (2) up to 42 in May, and five in June.

**England, E** Two localities: (1) lekking first noted 14th April, with 16 males and eight females, numbers increasing to 43 males and 20 females: although no proof, thought that three to six females may have bred; (2) four males at suitable breeding habitat in May.

**England, N** Two localities: (1) male in former locality on 28th May; (2) one, sex not indicated, on 20th May.

**1983 England, E** Two additional localities: (3) eight males in suitable breeding habitat on 5th May, but no subsequent proof of breeding; (4) male in suitable breeding habitat on 1st June.



	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	2	5	6	6	4	12	10	10	13	8	6
Nests	2	2	4	0	0	3	3	0	1	2	0
Max. no females possibly nesting	12	27	17	16	4	22	13	13	23	32	6

When most of those reported are males, it is difficult to give a realistic figure for the number of females possibly nesting! The figure six is derived entirely from the report from a single locality.

### **Jack Snipe** *Lymnocryptes minimus*

One locality: single.

**England, SE** One locality.

ESSEX/HERTFORDSHIRE One locality: solitary individual in March, June and July (and presumably in April and May, although apparently not observed), seen displaying.

This is a most unusual occurrence, the nearest breeding population being in central southern Sweden. The species has bred outside its normal breeding range, but very infrequently, and not in recent years.

### **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*

12 localities: 55-80 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** One locality: one or two pairs breeding.

SOMERSET One locality: two pairs, adult with flying young from 15th to 17th June.

**England, SE** Three localities: 0-20 pairs breeding.

ESSEX One locality: two in suitable habitat on 18th June.

KENT Two localities: (1) four on 18th May, three pairs and two males in June; (2) maxima of 22 in May and 34 in June.

**England, E** Five localities: 51-53 pairs breeding.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE Two localities: (1) 33 pairs breeding, only nine of which succeeded in rearing young, due to flooding; (2) nine pairs, four of which succeeded in fledging some young.

NORFOLK One locality: nine pairs breeding, but no chicks survived to flying stage, due to thunderstorms and flooding.

SUFFOLK Two localities: (1) pair probably bred; (2) pair in display flight on 1st May.

**England, N** Two localities: one to three pairs breeding.

LANCASHIRE One locality: pair on 28th May with two well-grown, but still downy, young.

CUMBRIA One locality: four in full breeding plumage on 27th April, two in breeding plumage on 15th July, five, including two juveniles, on 29th July. This site has not been known to be used before.

**Scotland, N & W** One locality.

SHETLAND One locality: one pair breeding.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	12	10	13	11	13	13	11	5	13	10	12
Confirmed (pairs)	51	63	72	37	50	39	52	22	38	32	55
Possible (pairs)	7	8	15	33	18	25	25	4	31	12	25
Max. total (pairs)	58	71	87	70	68	64	77	26	69	44	80

The long-term position seems to be one of some stability, but the breeding season of 1984 was undoubtedly a poor one.

### **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*

The Panel now collects information about breeding outside the northern isles, Shetland and Orkney

**Scotland, N** One locality: pair on territory on 19th May.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*

Four localities: four or five pairs breeding.

**Scotland, N** Four localities.

**INVERNESS-SHIRE** Three localities: (1) two pairs, only one of which nested, hatching three young from clutch of four on 28th June; (2) one to three in suitable habitat from 12th to 20th May, then, from 22nd to 29th June, a very agitated adult, suggestive that young had hatched; (3) pair with four eggs, at new site.

**SUTHERLAND** One locality: agitated adult on loch shore with unknown number of young on 24th July.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	4	5	3	4	7	3	4	1	4	3	4
Confirmed (pairs)	1	2	1	2	4	2	7	1	3	1	4
Possible (pairs)	4	4	2	3	6	2	5	0	3	4	1
Max. total (pairs)	5	6	3	5	10	4	12	1	6	5	5

It seems possible that some pairs of this species breed undetected every year in various of the most remote glens of Scotland.

**Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*

Four localities: 19-24 pairs breeding.

**Scotland, N & W** Four sites in three counties: (1) female from late May to late June, but no sign of male; (2) pair possibly breeding; (3) 17 or 18 pairs breeding; (4) four pairs, two breeding and two possibly breeding.

These figures are much the same as for 1983, and indicate little change in the species' fortunes.

**Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus*

Four localities in three counties: four or five pairs breeding.

**England, SW & SE** Four localities: (1) first-summer in colony of Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus*; (2) pair bred unsuccessfully; (3) pair, first seen on 1st April, bred, but outcome unknown; (4) two pairs in May, one of which reared two young.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	0	0	1	2	1	3	5	4	2	6	4
Confirmed (pairs)	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	3	2	2	4
Possible (pairs)	0	0	0	1	1	1	4	3	1	6	1
Max. total (pairs)	0	0	1	2	1	3	5	6	3	8	5

Although it is proving a very protracted process, there are encouraging signs that this species is becoming established as a breeder in southern England.

**Snowy Owl** *Nyctea scandiaca*

Three localities: single females only.

**Scotland, N & W** Three localities: (1)-(3) lone females summered on Fetlar and two other islands.

**Hoopoe** *Upupa epops*

Three localities: 0-3 pairs breeding.

**England, SE** Two localities: (1) single seen and heard on one day in June; (2) single seen on several dates between 22nd April and 7th July, inactive for long periods, and not thought likely that it bred.



**England, E** One locality: one for a few days before 12th June, calling regularly, two together on 15th June, at least one until 22nd June.

**Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla*

Nine localities: 0-10 pairs breeding.

**England, E** One locality.

**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE** One locality: single singing on 17th May, but not subsequently.

**Scotland, N & W** Eight localities.

**INVERNESS-SHIRE** Eight localities: (1) pair entering nest hole of Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* during last week in May; (2)(3) singles calling on 30th May, but not subsequently; (4) one on 23rd May; (5) two calling on 10th June, but not seen on 14th July; (6) one, apparently without a mate, calling in May and June; (7) one calling on 15th and 16th June; (8) pair in first week of June.

**1983 Scotland, N & W** Revised total, 11 localities.

**1983 INVERNESS-SHIRE** Nine additional localities: (2) one singing on 30th May and 28th June; (3) one sang on 19th May; (4) one sang on 18th May; (5) one sang during second week of June; (6) one sang on 9th July; (7) one sang on 28th May; (8) one sang on 3rd June; (9) one sang on 13th June; (10) two calling on 22nd May.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	6	10	7	17	22	7	11	2	9	14	9
Confirmed (pairs)	1	3	1	7	4	1	1	0	0	0	0
Possible (pairs)	5	7	6	12	19	8	13	2	10	15	10
Max. total (pairs)	6	10	7	19	23	9	14	2	10	15	10

Many of the reports are clearly of passage birds, but it is possible that when breeding does occur it is by displaced Scandinavian migrants. Since singing ceases almost as soon as pairing takes place, and the birds become very secretive and elusive, it is very difficult to distinguish between short-staying, singing migrants and breeding pairs.

**Woodlark** *Lullula arborea*

76 localities: 16-201 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** 27 localities, two to 90 pairs breeding.

**CORNWALL** Four localities: (1) two males on 24th March, single male on 21st and 25th June; (2) male on 15th May, two males on 24th May; (3) male on 25th May; (4) male during summer.

**DEVON** Six localities: (1) pair with four flying young on 1st July; (2) seven pairs located; (3) two singing on 19th May; (4) two singing on 8th April; (5) present February to October, six, including fledged young, on 18th May; (6) pair in suitable breeding habitat on 23rd April.

**DORSET** Five localities: (1) three pairs; (2) two pairs; (3) male on 1st May; (4) male on 15th June; (5) autumn flock of up to 18 represented local breeding population.

**HAMPSHIRE** 12 localities: (1)-(12) total of 59-63 pairs.

**England, SE** 13 localities: 14-27 pairs breeding.

**BERKSHIRE** Three localities: (1) pair carrying food on 13th and 14th June; (2) one to four seen on four dates between 6th May and 24th June; (3) one in song flight on 19th June.

**SURREY** Eight localities: (1) five pairs, three of which known to have bred; (2) one pair bred; (3) at least four pairs, of which two known to have bred; (4) three pairs bred; (5) one pair;



(6) at least one pair; (7) at least five pairs, of which three known to have bred; (8) one pair bred. One regular site was not visited and another had no Woodlarks in 1984.  
SUSSEX Two localities: (1)(2) total of three singing during breeding season.  
**England, E** 36 localities: 0-84 pairs breeding.  
NORFOLK 23 localities: 23 singing.  
SUFFOLK 13 localities: (1)-(12) total of 28 pairs; (13) 22 pairs.

The Woodlark is a new addition to the list of species for which the Panel collects data, and this first report presents a useful picture. Some 'localities' may be an isolated heath, others much larger areas of continuous distribution.

**Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris*

Three localities: 0-3 pairs breeding.

**England, N** Two localities.  
GREATER MANCHESTER One locality: pair, considered to have attempted breeding, but unsuccessfully.  
NORTH YORKSHIRE One locality: single calling from a tree-top on 30th June.  
**Scotland, N** One locality.  
SUTHERLAND One locality: two seen carrying food on 3rd July.  
**1983 Wales** One locality.  
1983 WEST GLAMORGAN One locality: two, one in partial moult, in association with Mistle Thrushes *Turdus viscivorus*. (For association with Mistle Thrushes see the Panel's report for 1983.)

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	8	10	11	6	3	6	5	6	7	10	3
Confirmed (pairs)	3	2	3	4	1	1	1	0	2	3	0
Possible (pairs)	4	8	9	2	3	5	4	6	5	9	3
Max. total (pairs)	7	10	12	6	4	6	5	6	7	12	3

This was the poorest year for breeding Fieldfares since 1973, but, because 1983 was a relatively good year for the species, it would be premature to attempt any conclusions.

**Redwing** *Turdus iliacus*

57 localities: 31-78 pairs breeding.

**England, SE** One locality.  
KENT One locality: pair found at nest on 15th and 16th May, but they deserted before eggs were laid.  
**Scotland, N & W** 56 localities.  
ABERDEENSHIRE One locality: very vocal pair on 15th July.  
INVERNESS-SHIRE 21 localities: (1) nest on 3rd June; (2) pair nesting on 10th June; (3) pair with young on 28th May; (4) agitated adult on 24th and 25th May; (5) adult carrying food on 15th June; (6)(7) total of six or seven singing males; (8) three singing males on 13th May; (9) three singing males on 28th May; (10) two singing on 2nd May; (11) two from late May to 2nd June, apparently not breeding; (12)-(21) singles, mostly singing, on dates between 2nd May and 24th June.  
ROSS-SHIRE Three localities: (1)(2) total of four singing on 21st May; (3) one on 7th July.  
SUTHERLAND 31 localities: (1)-(14) total of 26 pairs proved breeding; (15)-(31) total of at least 17 singing, and possibly several more.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	28	25	10	10	12	6	18	6	42	65	57
Confirmed (pairs)	4	13	3	2	3	2	7	4	30	17	31
Possible (pairs)	24	40	12	14	14	7	25	7	32	51	47
Max. total (pairs)	28	53	15	16	17	9	32	11	62	68	78



Once again, the high figures are as much a reflection of the amount of fieldwork devoted to the species as of true population levels. Many of those nesting are found in plantations of Sitka spruce *Picea sitchensis*, at heights of up to 25 feet (8 m), and the most common proof of breeding is the presence of adults carrying food.

**Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti*

108 localities: 78-318 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** 56 localities: 75-157 pairs breeding.

County	Localities	Breeding confirmed	Breeding probable	Breeding possible	Maximum total
Cornwall	5	1	0	10	11
Devon	9	30	0	0	30
Dorset	11	44	21-23	0	67
Hampshire	17	0	22-26	0	26
Isle of Wight	4	0	0	7	7
Somerset	10	0	16	0	16

**England, SE** Seven localities: one to 63 pairs breeding.

County	Localities	Breeding confirmed	Breeding probable	Breeding possible	Maximum total
Essex	1	1	0	0	1
Kent	5	0	61	0	61
Hertfordshire	1	0	0	1	1

**England, E** 45 localities: two to 98 pairs breeding.

County	Localities	Breeding confirmed	Breeding probable	Breeding possible	Maximum total
Cambridgeshire	3	1	3	0	4
Norfolk	35	0	63	0	63
Suffolk	7	1	30	0	31

**1983 England, E** Revised totals, 28 localities, 3-72 pairs breeding.

1983 SUFFOLK Revised totals: seven localities: (1)-(7) two pairs proved breeding and 20 judged probable.

**1983 England, Central** One locality.

1983 SHROPSHIRE One locality: single singing in June.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Counties	3	3	8	10	14	14	11	16	12	13	12
Confirmed (pairs)	5	8	8	13	30	46	19	56	29	90	78
Possible (pairs)	11	67	72	140	144	117	179	106	173	157	240
Max. total (pairs)	16	75	80	153	174	163	198	162	202	247	318

Although the figures suggest that there is some variation between counties concerning what is proven breeding and what is probable breeding, the trend as measured by the maximum possible interpretation of the figures continues to rise steeply. On the other hand, there appears to have been no significant extension of range for several years.

**River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis*

One locality: single male.

**England, E** One locality: male sang from 13th July to 2nd August in site typical of species' breeding habitat on Continent.

This is the first time that this species has appeared in the Panel's reports.

**Savi's Warbler** *Locustella luscinioides*

Ten localities: 0-12 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** Two localities: (1) one singing on 14th April and 23rd June; (2) one singing on 23rd and 29th April.

**England, SE** Three localities: (1) three individuals holding territories, the earliest date being 18th April; (2) male singing on 4th May; (3) male singing at regular site and possible female present for a month, but breeding not suspected.

**England, E** Four localities: (1)-(3) single singing males at each; (4) pair, which possibly bred.

**England, Central** One locality: singing male for at least four days, 2nd to 5th May.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	5	3	8	13	15	15	14	8	11	12	10
Confirmed (pairs)	1	1	0	3	4	6	2	5	0	2	0
Possible (pairs)	7	2	9	23	24	24	27	10	18	15	12
Max. total (pairs)	8	3	9	26	28	30	29	15	18	17	12

After four good years, from 1977 to 1980, this species now seems barely to be holding its own.

**Marsh Warbler** *Acrocephalus palustris*

28 localities: 26-51 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** Five localities: one to four pairs breeding.

**GLOUCESTERSHIRE** Two localities: (1) singing male plus one other; (2) singing male, and nest found on 28th October.

**ISLE OF WIGHT** Two localities: (1) one on 9th and 14th August; (2) one on 11th May and 13th July.

**SOMERSET** One locality: male singing from 29th June to at least 14th July.

**England, SE** Six localities: three to eight pairs breeding.

**ESSEX** One locality: singing male from 22nd to 24th June.

**KENT** Two localities: (1) at least one pair, adults carrying food on 5th July, and first young left nest on 17th July, four young eventually fledged, but eight were trapped in general area, so second pair could have been present; (2) singing male on 18th and 19th June (not present prior to 16th June), two adults with one juvenile on 18th July, at least one juvenile on 28th July, and three on 15th and 16th August. These birds were occupying stands of rosebay willowherb *Epilobium angustifolium* and were very inconspicuous.

**SUSSEX** Three localities: (1)-(3) singing males at each, breeding not suspected.

**England, E** One locality: one individual.

**HUNTINGDONSHIRE** One locality: male singing from 2nd to 8th May near where breeding occurred in 1983.

**England, Central** 16 localities: 22-27 pairs.

**WORCESTERSHIRE** 16 localities: (1)-(16) total of 38 singing males, but only 22-27 pairs discovered as result of intensive fieldwork.

**1983 England, SW** Revised total, six localities.

**1983 GLOUCESTERSHIRE** Two localities: (1) singing male on 14th June; (2) singing male from 8th June to 24th June.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	6	3	5	6	15	15	8	3	8	10	12
Confirmed (pairs)	0	0	0	2	4	1	2	0	2	3	4
Possible (pairs)	7	5	5	9	11	22	10	3	7	9	9
Max. total (pairs)	7	5	5	11	15	23	12	3	9	11	13



Since it has been difficult to obtain reliable information on a regular basis, this table omits reports from the stronghold of the species in Worcestershire. The exceptionally good information available from Worcestershire in this report is the result of full-time research. Although there are fears for the future well-being of the species, especially because of habitat loss, the scatter of records from southern counties, and particularly the breeding records from Kent, hint at a more secure future.

**Dartford Warbler** *Sylvia undata*

34 localities: 11-440 pairs or singing males.

**England, SW** 25 localities.

CORNWALL Four localities: (1)-(4) total of at least four pairs bred, with young seen at each site.

DEVON Seven localities: (1) probably at least three pairs bred; (2) immature male on 8th July and two juveniles on 1st September; (3) one on 9th February and family party on 4th September; (4) one singing in March; (5) pair reared one brood; (6) male displaying on 7th April and female seen on 18th May; (7) male seen on 11th June.

DORSET Four extensive localities: (1)-(4) total of 127 pairs ( $\pm 10\%$ ), these figures being result of detailed survey commissioned by RSPB.

HAMPSHIRE Seven localities, one of which very extensive: (1)-(7) total of 219 pairs or singing males, most probably bred, but only three reports of confirmed breeding received.

ISLE OF WIGHT Three localities: (1) male seen on 22nd July, and 4th and 10th November; (2) two males on 8th January, and one on 6th and 17th January; (3) one on 14th March, scolding.

**England, SE** Nine localities: (1) 23 pairs; (2) 17-20 pairs; (3) ten pairs; (4) 12-15 pairs; (5)(6) two pairs at each; (7)-(9) one pair at each.

This is the highest estimate since the last full survey, in 1974.

**Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapillus*

46 localities: four to 82 pairs.

**England, SW** 13 localities: 0-12 pairs breeding.

County	Localities	Breeding confirmed	Breeding probable	Breeding possible	Maximum total
Gloucestershire	2	0	0	2	2
Hampshire	9	0	7	0	7
Wiltshire	2	0	0	3	3

**England, SE** 23 localities: one to 46 pairs breeding.

County	Localities	Breeding confirmed	Breeding probable	Breeding possible	Maximum total
Berkshire	5	0	0	5	5
Bedfordshire	1	1	0	0	1
Buckinghamshire	5	0	17	2	19
Essex	2	0	0	2	2
Hertfordshire	2	0	0	2	2
Kent	5	0	12	2	14
Surrey	3	0	1	2	3

**England, E** Nine localities: two to 23 pairs breeding.

County	Localities	Breeding confirmed	Breeding probable	Breeding possible	Maximum total
Norfolk	1	1	0	0	1
Northamptonshire	2	1	10	0	11
Suffolk	6	0	2	9	11

**Wales** One locality: one pair breeding.

**POWYS** One locality: pair fledged three young.

**1983 England, SW** Revised totals, 41 localities, 3-120 pairs breeding.

**1983 GLOUCESTERSHIRE** Five additional localities: (3)-(7) total of ten singing males.

**1983 England, E** Revised total, two sites.

**1983 SUFFOLK** One locality: at least three singing males in early summer at locality frequented by the species in 1982.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	13	32	15	12	7	25	30	35	21	74	46
Confirmed (pairs)	1	4	4	2	1	9	7	15	4	5	4
Possible (pairs)	36	119	24	29	10	64	71	87	40	169	78
Max. total (pairs)	37	123	28	31	11	73	78	102	44	174	82

Compared with 1983, the totals show a sharp decline, especially in Hampshire and Kent. It is possible that the breeding numbers in any year are much influenced by the weather at the time of the spring migration. The long-term trend is, nevertheless, slowly upwards.

**Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

One locality: male in summer.

**1983 Scotland, Mid** One locality.

**1983 PERTSHIRE** One locality: male frequented edge of spruce plantation/deciduous woodland on south-facing hillside from 21st May to 26th June (*Brit. Birds* 78: 576).

This is the first time that this species has featured in the Panel's reports. The Greenish Warbler has been slowly extending its range westwards for perhaps thirty years, and nowadays there are many more records of migrants/vagrants (see *Brit. Birds* 78: 437-451).

**Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus*

Ten localities: four to 18 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** One locality: pair bred, fledging two young in late June/early July.

**England, SE** One locality: male heard on 6th May.

**England, E** Seven localities: (1) pair nested at previously used site; (2) male on 7th June, but series of sightings suggest that there could be regular breeding site nearby; (3) male carrying nesting material on 4th May and 6th May, pair present on 9th May, male from 17th June until August, female last seen on 27th May; (4) seven or eight pairs held territory and probably bred, at least two family parties reported; (5) pair on 15th July; (6) two males on 6th June; (7) pair possibly bred.

**England, Central** One locality: male and female from 4th to 23rd May, male heard on 17th June and seen on 16th August.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	3	4	11	16	14	17	17	13	12	14	10
Confirmed (pairs)	2	2	7	6	7	3	2	4	3	2	4
Possible (pairs)	2	5	16	15	21	27	26	22	18	21	14
Max. total (pairs)	4	7	23	21	28	30	28	26	21	23	18

Unless there are records yet to be reported, 1984 was the poorest year for this species since 1975.

**Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio*

Five localities: six to ten pairs breeding.

**England, E** Four extensive localities: (1)-(3) single pairs reared total of seven young; (4) six pairs, three of which reared total of nine young.



**Scotland, Mid** One locality: male from mid May to late July and female on 22nd May, but no evidence of breeding.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Counties	8	7	5	13	11	10	5	6	2	3	4
Confirmed (pairs)	30	51	3	48	13	14	23	11	5	11	6
Possible (pairs)	22	5	22	16	24	38	8	29	3	1	4
Max. total (pairs)	52	56	25	64	37	52	31	40	8	17	10

Save that more young were reared, the position was, if anything, worse than in 1983.

**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla*

Five localities: one to nine pairs breeding.

**England, N** One locality: flock of 30 stayed until at least 29th April. On 1st September, juvenile male in full body moult and adult male moulting wings and tail were mist-netted and female called loudly from 2 m away.

**Scotland, S** Three localities: (1) three on 8th July; (2) one on 30th July; (3) six on 31st August.

**Scotland, N** One locality: singing male on 11th June.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	0	0	0	2	2	3	3	1	10	8	5
Confirmed (pairs)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	1
Possible (pairs)	0	0	0	3	2	3	4	0	8	7	8
Max. total (pairs)	0	0	0	3	2	4	4	1	10	8	9

The presence in northern England and southern Scotland may perhaps be connected. The English birds were in a garden 1½ km from birch scrub and could perhaps have been escaped cage-birds living ferally; but this could hardly be true of all the Scottish records.

**Serín** *Serinus serinus*

Four localities: two to five pairs breeding.

**England, SW** Three localities.

**DEVON** Two localities: (1) observed or heard between 6th April and 25th July, male singing and/or displaying on eight dates, nest found in December; (2) observed or heard between 11th April and 25th August, originally two males and two females, but one female disappeared, pair reared five young from two broods.

**DORSET** One locality: pair showed intentions of breeding, nest material being carried by female on two occasions in late April.

**England, Central** One locality.

**SHROPSHIRE** One locality: male singing on 30th May; the same, or another, male singing 4 km away on 9th June.

**1983 England, E** Revised total, two localities.

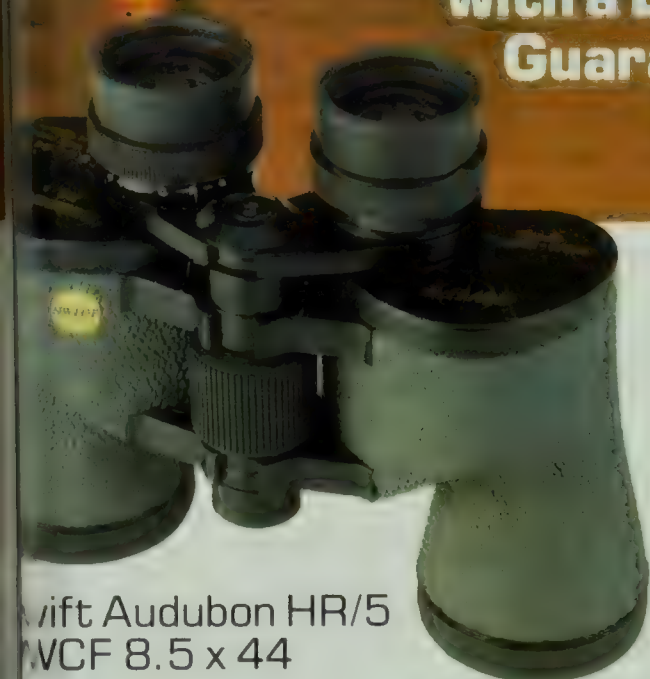
**1983 SUFFOLK** One locality: singing male on 30th May, not seen or heard subsequently.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
No. localities	0	0	2	0	4	0	1	3	5	7	4
Confirmed (pairs)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	2	2
Possible (pairs)	0	0	2	0	3	0	1	4	6	5	3
Max. total (pairs)	0	0	2	0	4	0	1	6	7	7	5

The year 1984 continued the slightly better sequence which began in 1981, but the breeding population is still far from being firmly established.

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## TWENTIETH CENTURY WILDLIFE ARTISTS

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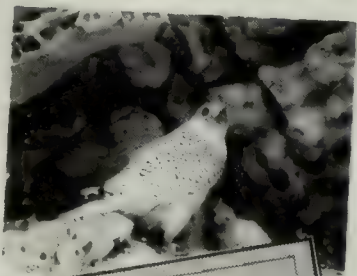
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**Parrot Crossbill** *Loxia pytyopsittacus*

Two localities: one or two pairs breeding.

**England, E** Two localities: (1) in Norfolk, pair bred and fledged four young, of which only one survived, then two young fledged from second brood; (2) two males and two females with three fledged juveniles from 29th April onwards into late summer, assumed to have bred reasonably locally.

The first known breeding attempt in Britain by this species occurred in northern England in 1983.

**Scarlet Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus*

Two localities: 0-2 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** One locality.

**DEVON** One locality: male from 4th June to 12th July, frequently singing, seen briefly with female on 12th June.

**Scotland, N & W** One locality.

**ROSS-SHIRE** One locality: male on 1st June.

**1983 Scotland, N & W** Three additional localities: (2) male singing regularly in gardens and wood from 4th to 27th June; (3) male sang for one day only, 24th June; (4) on Fair Isle, Shetland, male in song during 31st May to 21st July.

This is a species which, like the Greenish Warbler, is extending its range westwards, and it bred in Scotland in 1982 (*Brit. Birds* 77: 133-135).

**Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Ten localities: five to 16 pairs breeding.

**Scotland, Mid and N & W** Ten localities: (1) four or five pairs, one clutch of four just hatching on 22nd July; (2) pair on 2nd May and later; (3) two females feeding broods of two and one on 23rd July; (4) female on 8th May; (5) singing male on 9th May, female nearby on 16th June; (6) pair on 28th June and seven, mainly juveniles, on 16th August; (7) two males in song on 30th June; (8) male in song on 23rd June; (9) male in song on 4th July; (10) 'stock above average', but no numbers given.

This is a rather fuller report than we have been able to publish for several years, and we are grateful to all those observers who contributed records.

**Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus*

67 localities: 0-69 pairs breeding.

**England, SW** 66 localities.

**CORNWALL** Two localities: (1) pair and singing male on 28th May, one on 22nd June, two males on 24th August.

**DEVON** 55 localities: (1)-(55) total of 55 pairs, but this thought to be less than half the true county total.

**SOMERSET** Nine localities: (1) pair and singing male, one male seen to carry food; (2) two singing males; (3) pair; (4)-(9) single males.

**England, SE** One locality.

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE** One locality: singles on 14th October, 1st December and 13th December, the last mentioned being sexed as male: reported by Recorder as 'the remaining Bucks pair, despite lack of breeding season reports.'

Although the figures are much lower than the 37-145 pairs reported for 1983, a full count in Devon would certainly have narrowed the gap.



# Product reports

Items included in this feature have been submitted by the manufacturers or their agents. The reviews are the personal opinions of the reviewers; they are not the result of technical tests, but are assessments made after use in the appropriate conditions (e.g. in the field). Neither *British Birds* nor the individual reviewers can accept responsibility for any adverse consequences of opinions stated, and items are accepted for review on this understanding. We aim, however, to be helpful both to our readers and to the manufacturers of goods used by birdwatchers. EDS

## Mirador SSF60 25 × 60mm telescope

I have always been just a 'binocular birder'. Two things turned me against using a telescope as an extra tool: first, the price, and, secondly, my acute 'blur-eye syndrome' during prolonged use. It is with this biased background that I report on my trials with this new telescope from *Mirador*.

I was immediately impressed with the model's presentation and 'feel', the main body being of an 'eggshell-type' finish, with typical black lens surrounds. Both lenses have their own cover; the screw-on eyepiece-cover seems to be an especially sound idea. General construction is sturdy, as it proved during some fairly severe braking on its first car journey, and quite 'chunky', being 29 cm long (33 cm with the two lens covers) by 8 cm high. Its weight is not too much of a burden, at 750 g.

Use in the field was also impressive. I tried 'shooting from the shoulder'—which, with one arm braced against my side as a stabiliser, proved quite proficient for limited periods—as well as with a tripod.

It was easy to focus quickly—nearly as quick as with my binoculars—the movement on the eyepiece being very smooth. I would, however, have preferred the grip on the eyepiece to have been wider, as I found my fingers slipping during focusing when I inadvertently used the smooth area beyond the grip. I have one other grouse concerning the eyepiece: the lack of a flexible eye cup, which would have been useful not only for spectacle wearers, but also for persons, such as myself, whose eye-lashes interfere with vision when eyes are pressed too close to a lens.

Optically it performs well, with a sharp, bright image, even in quite poor light, not only at the lens centre, but also on the periphery. There is no colour fringing. It does very well to focus down to about 6 m, and has a field of view of 126 feet (38.4 m) at 1,000 yards (305 m): ideal for getting on to a single bird in a general area.

I tried the telescope in many different habitats and in differing weather conditions; I did not, however, use it in heavy rain, so can pass no comment on how waterproof it may be.

In truth, it is not an *Optolyth* or *Bushnell*, but within its price range (under £100, not including a case) it will prove hard to beat. The suggested improvements to the eyepiece should add little if anything to the cost; I hope that the manufacturer takes note.

Generally it did not let me down, and, although still a binocular birder, I found its performance and its relatively low price made it a practical and useful extra tool in the fight to achieve the identification of distant blobs.

I can only compliment the manufacturers on producing such a good, low-cost telescope.

NORMAN ARLOTT

# Mystery photographs



**118** Last month's mystery photograph (plate 232, repeated here) clearly shows a small passerine with streaked upperparts, a bold head pattern and a conical bill. These features suggest that it is either a bunting or perhaps an American sparrow. A closer look shows that the bird has completely white outer webs to the outer tail feathers; of the American sparrows, only Vesper Sparrow *Pooecetes gramineus* shows this character, but that species can quickly be eliminated as it has a rather plain face pattern. So, our bird has to be a bunting, but which of the 22 species on the West Palearctic list?

Our bird shows a narrow crown-stripe, dark lateral crown-stripes, malar stripe, submoustachial stripe, a prominent supercilium, streaked underparts and pale legs. This combination of features is common to only three species: Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*, Little Bunting *E. pusilla* and Reed Bunting *E. schoeniclus*.

Returning to the photograph, we can see that there is no contrast between the pale fringes of the median and greater coverts and the tips of those feathers, so there is no obvious wing-bar. This suggests Reed Bunting, as both Little and Rustic Buntings show prominent wing-bars, especially on the median coverts. The supercilium appears to be almost uniform in width until it tapers off at the rear of the ear-coverts, another feature suggestive of Reed Bunting as both Rustic and Little Buntings tend to show a broader supercilium behind the eye than in front. The bill shape is a little difficult to judge due to some foreshortening, but it appears that the culmen is convex, as on Reed, rather than straight or slightly concave as on Little Bunting. Thus, we can deduce that the bird is a Reed Bunting; it was photographed by Dr R. J. Chandler in October 1983 in Kent.

The main differences between Little and Reed Buntings were well covered in a paper by D. I. M. Wallace (*Brit. Birds* 69: 465-473) and further points were made by J. R. Mather (*Brit. Birds* 72: 387-388): some of these are well illustrated in the photographs, such as the presence of a bold malar



stripe which reaches to the base of the bill (less well-marked on Little, not reaching bill-base); the rather diffuse streaking on the breast and flanks (rather neat 'pencil mark' streaks on Little); the dark eye-stripe does not continue around the rear of the ear-coverts and "along the lower border to below the eye as it does on Little Bunting; there is a thin moustachial stripe, reaching the bill-base (lacking or less well-marked on Little); and the eye-ring is not very prominent. In life, or in a colour plate, we might also see that the lesser coverts are bright chestnut rather than dull olive-brown as on Little Bunting (but note that the lesser coverts are often concealed by the overlapping breast-side feathers and scapulars). The general coloration of the sides of the head would be rather dull, unlike the rather bright chestnut or rufous fore-supercilium, lores and ear-coverts of Little Bunting. If we were to hear the bird call, our attention would be drawn to the typical 'tsew' note of Reed, which is quite distinct from the 'tic' note of Little Bunting, recalling Robin *Erithacus rubecula*. Some authors have made much of the rather neckless, hunched appearance of Little Bunting, but, whilst this may be a useful feature, one should always beware that (as in the photograph) a Reed Bunting can also give this appearance, rather than its perhaps more familiar upright stance.

IAIN ROBERTSON



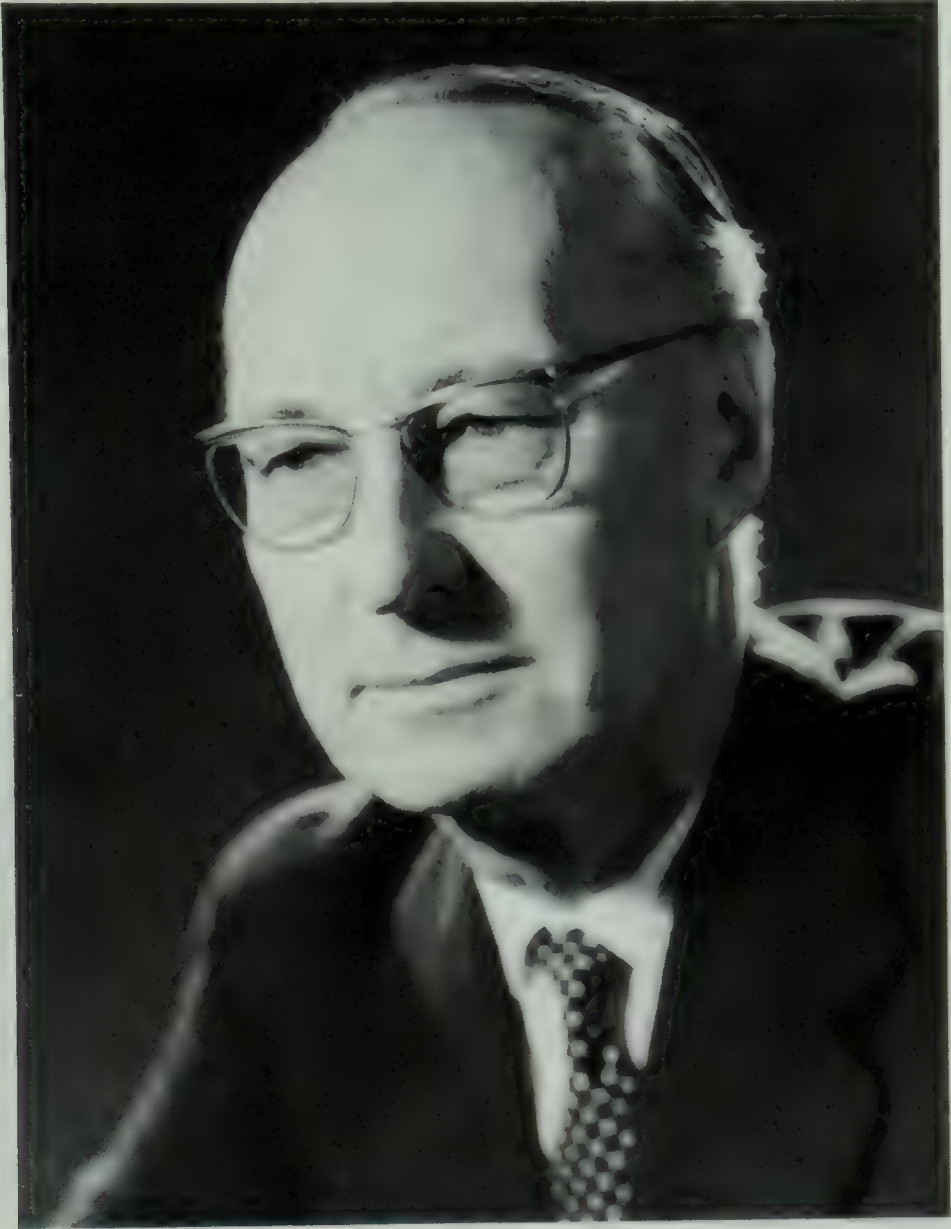
264. Mystery photograph 119. Identify the species. Answer next month

## Seventy-five years ago...

'EXTERMINATION OF THE SEA-EAGLE IN IRELAND. In the *Zoologist* 1911 (p. 346), Mr. R. Warren records the disappearance of the Sea-Eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) from their last breeding haunts in Ireland, on the cliffs of north Mayo. They have been destroyed by the keepers of the adjacent grouse-shootings, and at the present time the only relics of their former presence are the old nests, which are still visible at several places along the cliffs... The disappearance of this fine species from the Irish fauna is a national loss, and is the more to be regretted as the breeding stock in Scotland is now reduced to a very low ebb, so that any untoward accident to the few surviving pairs will mean the extinction of this species in the British Isles. F. C. R. JOURDAIN.' (*Brit. Birds* 5: 139, October 1911)

# Obituary

**Professor William Homan Thorpe, MA ScD FRS (1902-1986)**



**265.** Professor W. H. Thorpe (*Edward Leigh*)

Bill Thorpe was one of the select band of ornithologists who became Fellows of the Royal Society. He began his career as an entomologist, investigating the numbers and problems of the biological control of insect pests in California and Hawaii. He became a fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1952, and later a lecturer in entomology. He played a large part in bringing to the notice of biologists the existence of 'biological races' and their importance in the modern approach to the classification of animals. Much of his work dealt with the problems of parasites. He demonstrated that 'olfactory' conditioning of parasitic insects reared in an unusual host caused them to develop a definite preference for these environments when, as adults, they came to lay their eggs. But, during this period, Bill's interest in birds was strong, and he was one of the few ornithologists who visited



Albania to study its birds. He also did work on one of the biological curiosities of the world—the petroleum fly, which lives in crude oil in southern California.

After 1945, he turned increasingly to birds. He realised that the scientific study of bird behaviour would be an ideal field in which a deeper understanding of the learning process could be gained and so went on to develop the Madingley field station. His studies of the learning and instinct in birds, and especially the comparative analysis of bird song, won him a wide international reputation. He wrote two important books, *Learning and Understanding in Animals* (1951) and *Bird Song* (1966). Soon afterwards, he agreed to act as adviser on bird song to *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*, and the contributions made by him and his staff at Madingley, especially Mrs Joan Hall-Craggs, played a vital part in clarifying the treatment of this difficult subject. He was appointed Reader in animal behaviour at Cambridge, and promoted to Professor in 1966.

Thorpe was not an easy man to know, but his acute intelligence and his deep interest in conservation made him an ideal field companion. SC

## Notes

**Egret in mid Atlantic** On 21st November 1984, I was on board HMS *Sirius* sailing from Newfoundland, Canada, to Plymouth, Devon. When about 1,500 km west of Cornwall, at approximately 50°N, an egret *Egretta Bubulcus* circled strongly around the ship for part of the day, occasionally trying to land, but each time changing its mind at the last moment.

The egret had wholly white plumage, a bright yellow bill and dark (probably black) legs and feet. Size of a lone bird is always difficult to assess, but I judged this bird to be smaller than a Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, and believe that it was a Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* rather than a Great White Egret *E. alba*.

The weather in the North Atlantic during the preceding several days had been severe westerly gales, and I feel certain that this egret had a North American rather than a European origin. I suspect that this may also be the case with a number of egrets and herons in western Britain and Ireland in autumn.

F. C. SALTER

22 Ridgeway, Saltash, Cornwall PL12 4PS

The Rarities Committee considered that the egret's identity could not be determined with certainty, but that this interesting record nevertheless merited publication. Eds

**Mute Swans foot-slapping as a territorial advertisement display**  
R. V. A. Marshall's note on 'alighting-display' of Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*



(*Brit. Birds* 77: 153-154) prompts the following. In October 1982, at Eastpark Wildfowl Refuge, Caerlaverock, Dumfries & Galloway, a single male Mute Swan defended a small pond long before the breeding season and before securing a mate. He frequently ran across the 100-m-long pond, loudly slapping the surface of the water and flapping his wings. The display was identical to that described by Mr Marshall, except that it was never seen when the swan first alighted on the water, but only after it was already on the pond. The purpose of this foot-slapping behaviour was evidently to keep all other Mute Swans from the pond. Between 10th and 22nd October, the displaying swan was alone on the pond for 70% of the time, while another pond nearby, behind embankments and buildings, had about 40 Mutes on it. During a continuous all-day watch on 16th October, the swan was alone for most (88%) of the day, vigilantly patrolling the water for 71% of the daylight hours; foot-slapping occurred 12 times when the male was alone, and five times when chasing other swans that landed, but, despite this conspicuous foot-slapping chase, it still took about 13 minutes to evict the intruders. Because of an increased usage of the pond, often by over 100 Whooper *C. cygnus* and Bewick's Swans *C. columbianus*, after 22nd October, the territorial behaviour was curtailed. Only once after this date was the Mute Swan seen alone on the pond (in November), but no displays were observed, and both ponds on the refuge were used equally by all the 50 or so Mute Swans present.

I suggest that foot-slapping functions as both a visual and an auditory advertisement for the establishment or maintenance of a territory. The behaviour was certainly audible to other swans in the area, which probably associated it with being chased from the pond by the dominant cob. Brief foot-slapping displays performed throughout the day by a lone male swan seem to be a more cost-efficient behaviour than spending over ten minutes in aggressive chasing and fighting with each group of intruders.

By establishing a territory in October, for however brief a time, Mute Swans may have a better chance of re-establishing it in spring. Scott (1983) showed that it was usual for Mute Swan pairs to maintain a territory, even in autumn or winter. In light of my observations, one possible reason for autumn territorial behaviour may be to attract a mate to the area, as do Shelducks *Tadorna tadorna* (Patterson 1982). It is possible that this period of territorial establishment, including foot-slapping displays and advertisements, may contain some of the necessary cues for mate attraction.

JEFFREY M. BLACK

*The Wildfowl Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucester GL2 7BT*

In a contribution published since Jeffrey Black's note was submitted to *British Birds*, Lumsden (1985) emphasised the aggressive element of the display, particularly that by males defending breeding territories: he called the display 'foot clapping', a term which we regard as less appropriate than 'foot-slapping'. Eds

#### REFERENCES

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**Canvasbacks and Tufted Duck feeding in association with mole** On 18th March 1983, at Martin Mere, Lancashire, we watched, at a range of about 5m, two captive male Canvasbacks *Aythya valisineria* and a female Tufted Duck *A. fuligula* feeding vigorously on and around a small patch of close-cropped grass about 30cm in diameter. The grass was being raised to 5cm from beneath by a mole *Talpa europaea*. The mole appeared unconcerned by the movement or weight of one or more of the ducks on top of the moving mound or by the vigorous prodding of their bills. The ducks were feeding on earthworms coming to the surface. The worms emerged rapidly, and were simply picked up by the ducks, rather than being pulled from the ground. For most of the time, the dominant male Canvasback stood on the moving mound and fed by facing in the direction in which the mole was working. The behaviour was observed for about five minutes, during which time possibly 20 worms were taken. Eventually, the ground stopped moving and the ducks dispersed.

E. E. GREEN, R. W. ASHFORD and D. H. HARTRIDGE  
22 Reeve Road, Holyport, Maidenhead, Berkshire

**Sparrowhawk killing Lapwing in water** At about midday on 18th March 1983, in clear, bright weather at Loch Ken, Dumfries, a large mixed flock of Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* and other birds flew at speed and in commotion from the shore and adjacent fields out over the water. We then noticed a female Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* among the flying birds. After an aerial chase of possibly 15 seconds, with repeated evasive manoeuvres by the Lapwings, the raptor caught a single Lapwing and together they dropped about 3m into the water. The hawk appeared to be floating and drifting slowly sideways, with head erect and wings and tail spread on the water, while the Lapwing was submerged. After about three minutes in this position, the hawk lifted off the water, carrying the Lapwing, and flew some 5m to a clump of rushes *Juncus*, where it was obscured from view. About two minutes later, it again flew some 10 m, carrying the Lapwing in one foot, to another clump of rushes, where it could be seen plucking its prey. While in the water and then in the rushes, the Sparrowhawk, which we identified as a first-year, was constantly mobbed by Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* and Carrion Crows *Corvus corone*; after a few minutes, it abandoned its victim and flew 400m to a wood on the opposite bank.

Although the Lapwing is a frequent prey of Sparrowhawks (Newton & Marquiss, 1982, *J. Zool.* 197: 221-240), this observation seems noteworthy because the Sparrowhawk was able to float while holding the Lapwing underwater, and was able to rise from the water while carrying the prey, which probably weighed about 250g (almost as much as itself). Because of the infrequency of observations of successful Sparrowhawk hunts, we believe the manner in which the raptor caught its prey to be also of interest.

E. E. GREEN, R. W. ASHFORD and D. H. HARTRIDGE  
22 Reeve Road, Holyport, Maidenhead, Berkshire

**Osprey catching two fish in one dive** At 09.35 GMT on 29th June 1984, at Island Mere, Minsmere, Suffolk, I observed an Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

being mobbed by a male Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, which followed it closely around the vicinity of the mere for several minutes before flying off. Almost immediately, the Osprey plunged from a height of about 20m into the mere and then took off. When it was clear of the water, I saw that the Osprey had caught two fish, one in each foot: one was a roach *Rutilus rutilus*, which I estimated to be approximately 1lb (0.45kg) in weight, and the other was a rudd *Scardinius erythrophthalmus* about half the size of the roach. After catching the two fish, the Osprey continued to gain height and, while in the air, shook excess water from its plumage in the normal way. As it then began to fly away from the mere, it appeared deliberately to drop the roach; the rudd was manipulated into the normal 'torpedo' position and the Osprey continued its flight. *BWP* states 'Rarely, 2 small fish caught in single dive'. The interesting thing in this case was the almost complete lack of preparation prior to plunging into the water. The Osprey was clearly occupied by the attentions of the harrier, and the impression of its dive was that it was completely spontaneous. My previous experience of the species has always indicated that each dive is usually carried out following initial hovering or slow gliding. The water at Minsmere was relatively shallow, and no doubt the Osprey had little difficulty in locating fish. If one concludes that the Osprey's dive was spontaneous, the fact that two fish were caught may have been sheer accident. In view of the almost ideal conditions at the time, however, it could be argued that the Osprey required little, if any, preparation before executing the dive and may have deliberately plunged at, and caught, two fish before subsequently discarding one.

STEVE TURNBULL

15 The Crescent, Keswick, Cumbria CA12 5HB

**Greater Sand Plover in Norfolk** At Breydon Water, near Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, 17th April 1981 was a fine and sunny day with an easterly wind which had prevailed for several days. In the morning, T. E. Boulton, J. O'Sullivan and I were counting waders on the mudflats opposite one of the reserve's two observation hides when I located a single unidentified plover *Charadrius* feeding by itself on a strip of mud some 250 m away. Carefully focusing the 30 × *Optolyth* telescope, I identified it as a Kentish Plover *C. alexandrinus*, despite initially observing what appeared to be smudges on its breast, and I informed TEB and JO'S of this bird. Both confirmed the identification. JO'S continued to watch the bird, which soon flew off much farther out on the flats and was lost to view amongst the mass of other waders assembled on the tideline. The sighting of this Kentish Plover was mentioned later in the day to T. W. Fairless, who, having not seen a Kentish Plover before, tried in the afternoon to relocate it. This he did at 14.00 GMT and was very fortunate in that it was feeding in an area very close to the estuary wall. TWF was, however, unhappy concerning its size, and immediately informed me, stating that the bird was clearly larger than Ringed Plovers *C. hiaticula* feeding alongside it. Considering this, and thinking back to the morning's observation and, in particular, the smudges on the breast, I wondered whether the bird was a Greater Sand Plover *C. leschenaultii*, two of which had recently been seen in Britain. Within minutes,



TWF and I had relocated the bird in the area in which TWF had left it, close to the estuary wall. I immediately recognised it as a sand plover and as the same bird seen at long range in the morning. From 15.00 hours until dusk, it was observed at distances down to 35 m. A. D. Boote arrived at 16.00 hours, and G. E. Dunmore a little later. It was last seen at the eastern end of the estuary, with a handful of Ringed Plovers at roost. A thorough search by a much increased number of birders the following morning failed to relocate it.

The following notes are extracted from my field notes.

**GENERAL APPEARANCE** Very pale, sandy-mantled plover, with indistinct breast-band like Kentish Plover or perhaps small Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*. Apparently in excellent condition: fat and plump; when alongside Ringed Plover, obviously much larger, perhaps by as much as one-third.

**BILL** Very heavy-looking (considerably thicker than that of Ringed Plover, especially at base, and ending rather bluntly at tip), estimated to be two-thirds length of head; at very close range, became even more of a feature, looking too heavy for bird of its size; black or blackish.

**LEGS** Long for bird of its size, perhaps a good half-inch (1.3 cm) longer than those of Ringed Plovers, and appearing dark at distance. Closer views revealed them to be olive, although in certain light conditions noted as having reddish tint.

**EYE** Dark.

**BEHAVIOUR** Fed in manner of Grey Plover: slow and deliberate. Jizz totally different from that of Ringed Plovers close by, with its long legs, high-domed crown peaking a fraction behind eye, and body perhaps as much as an inch (2.5 cm) longer than that of

Ringed Plover. When in flight, legs extended beyond tip of tail, but not noticeably so.

**PLUMAGE** Underparts white. Breast-band indistinct, especially at distance, but well-defined at sides, which were sandy-chestnut, with thinner, sandy line in between. Crown and forehead sandy-brown, with slight traces of white just above darkish lores. Narrow white supercilium and dark brown ear-coverts. White throat and chin contrasting exceptionally well with darker head. Nape and hindneck pale sandy, continuing onto pale sandy mantle with very slightly darker upper scapulars and area at bend of wing, becoming darker towards primaries; paler lower scapulars gave slight appearance of very pale sandy-coloured wing-panel. In flight, revealed a conspicuous pale whitish wing-bar extending only to base of primaries; whitish underwing also noted. Tail and rump sandy-coloured, with whitish outer tail feathers.

**FLIGHT ACTION** Not unlike that of Ringed Plover, though wing-beats perhaps slightly slower.

**VOICE** It was not heard to call.

The Greater Sand Plover always kept to the higher and drier parts of the mudflats and fed constantly, sometimes pulling out ragworms of considerable size.

This was the third record for Britain, after singles in West Sussex in winter 1978/79 (*Brit. Birds* 73: 568-573) and Avon in winter 1979/80 (*Brit. Birds* 73: 583-586). It is interesting to note that the first and only British Caspian Plover *C. asiaticus* occurred only a few hundred metres from the location of these observations, in May 1894.

P. R. ALLARD

13 Dolman Close, Cobholm, Gt Yarmouth NR31 0BE

**Arctic Tern with head-pattern resembling that of Forster's Tern** In their note on a Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* in Cornwall, S. C. Madge and P. S. Madge (*Brit. Birds* 76: 576-578) referred to 'an all-white crown, a black mask and a long, slender bill' and continued 'this could fit only Forster's



Fig. 1. Immature plumages of Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea*, Lothian, June 1984: top, normal first-summer; bottom, individual resembling Forster's Tern *S. forsteri* (A. J. Kilgour)

Tern'. An Arctic Tern *S. paradisaea* at Aberlady Bay, Lothian, during 2nd-4th June 1984, however, showed a similar head-pattern.

On the first, brief sighting, as the bird flew past PRG and out of sight, all that was noted was that it was a tern similar in size and build to an Arctic Tern, with a seemingly long, black bill and a white head, with black confined to the ear-coverts. Later that day, the bird was well-watched by several observers as it flew about and perched in the company of both Arctic and Common *S. hirundo* Terns. Again, the head-pattern in flight views suggested the possibility of Forster's Tern. On the ground, however, its structure resembled that of Arctic Tern, with very short legs and tail-streamers exceeding folded wings at rest by about 2 cm, but the bill appeared very slightly longer and more slender. Its forehead and crown were white, with thick black patches on the ear-coverts, extending slightly in front of the eyes, forming a mask. These patches were joined across the nape by a mottled grey area, not visible in flight. The all-black bill also contributed to the unusual appearance of the head. The rest of the plumage resembled that of adult Arctic Tern, except for all-white underparts and a slightly darker fore-edge to the inner wing, noted when the bird was perched, but not seen when it was in flight. Its legs were very dark red, appearing black in most views.

Although the initial impression in flight was of an immature or winter-plumaged Forster's Tern, all observers agreed with the final identification, based on structure and wing-pattern, as an Arctic Tern, probably in second-summer plumage. The bill-length was thought to be exaggerated by its black coloration, and the bird showed much more white on its head than



is usual on immature or winter-plumaged Arctic Terns, with which several of the observers were familiar.

PETER R. GORDON, IAN J. ANDREWS, ALLAN BROWN  
and A. JOHN KILGOUR

*Dairy Cottage, Craigiellaw, Longniddry, East Lothian EH32 0PY*

P. J. Grant has commented that he would expect a second-summer Arctic Tern to look more like an adult, and this individual is in his opinion more likely to have been a first-summer. EDS

**Little Swift in Dorset** I was walking along the shoreline of Shell Bay, Studland Nature Reserve, Dorset, at approximately 13.45 GMT on 26th November 1983, when I noticed a small bird flying low over the dunes. My immediate impression was that it was an exceptionally late Swift *Apus apus*. I ran to the top of the highest dune to observe it from a higher level, and was startled to find that it had a white rump, a squarer-ended tail, and that it looked decidedly smaller than a Swift. I immediately took notes and ran back along the beach to the nearest telephone box to inform J. R. Cox, the warden of the Reserve. I passed N. Spring, who was leading a YOC group, and informed him that I had just seen a swift with a white rump, that I was unsure of the species, but that it was either a White-rumped Swift *A. caffer* or a Little Swift *A. affinis*. I next observed the bird at about 15.20 hours, by which time several other observers, including J. R. Cox, S. Guy, P. Harvey, T. Haysom and I. Lewis, were watching the swift and had positively identified it as a Little Swift.

General coloration very dark brown, with slightly varied shades of brown on wings; at 15.30 hours, appeared black, as light rapidly deteriorated. Squarish, clean white rump was most distinctive feature. Completely dark underparts except for pale throat, visible only at close range. Squarish tail appeared to have slight notch when feathers fanned out. Wings broader and shorter than those of Swift. Shape typical of swift family, with wings set well forward on body, and deep, almost bat-like wing-beats.

The bird was observed until 16.20 hours, by which time the visibility was very poor. Despite extensive searching the following day, it was not relocated.

This is the first record for Dorset and the fifth for Britain and Ireland.

DAVID BRYER-ASH  
*33A Kings Avenue, Parkstone, Poole, Dorset BH14 9QG*

**Spotted Flycatcher sunning** The afternoon of 11th August 1976 was sunny and hot, with a cloudless sky and only a slight breeze. On the edge of a bed of shrubs in the grounds of Leicester University, several Blackbirds *Turdus merula* were sunning, together with a Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*. All were lying on the ground, with both wings extended and head erect, the head feathers being ruffled up. After a while, they were joined by a Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*; this disturbed the Wren, which flew off. The flycatcher then assumed a sunning posture similar to that described above, but lying slightly to one side and with only one wing extended. Within a very short time, the Wren returned and the flycatcher left. There appears to be no other record in the literature of sunning behaviour by Spotted Flycatchers.

D. A. C. McNEIL  
*175 Byron Street, Loughborough, Leicestershire*

**Yellowhammer bathing in sea water** At about 09.30 GMT on 20th July 1983, I was walking along the shore road on the north side of Beaully Firth near Coulmore House, Black Isle, Ross & Cromarty. The day was perfectly calm, warm and fairly sunny. The tide had receded about 6 m from the grassy bank over a fairly level shore of not very big stones, leaving little 'basins' of sea water several square centimetres in area and about 2.5 cm deep. Just ahead of me, a female Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* flew down to the water's edge, bathed for about five minutes, and then flew back into the brambles *Rubus*. During July there had been only 11 mm of rain, so there were no puddles or boggy areas left in the area to provide fresh water. All the same, it is surprising to find a passerine taking a saltwater bath, especially when it is noticeable that gulls *Larus* prefer to bathe in fresh water in rivers and inland ponds.

ELSPETH BARTLETT

1 Craigrory, North Kessock, Inverness IV1 1XH

## Letters

**'Racial identification of Cattle Egret'** I was very sorry to read the article (*Brit. Birds* 78: 659-661) for a number of reasons. I hesitated for a long time before submitting my paper on 'Field identification of West Palearctic white herons and egrets', because I thought it might mislead observers into thinking that such identification was quite simple. My paper was based on many thousands of sightings, and on many many photographs. Even then, I was concerned to emphasise the likelihood of individual variations from the norm. Now we have Laurel Tucker suggesting that from one single observation we can identify the Asiatic race of the Cattle Egret from the nominate, in winter plumage! Taxonomically, there are no discernible differences, nor is there any skeletal evidence to indicate that the neck is longer in the Asiatic race. Vaurie suggested, from the few skins available to him, that *coromandus* had more of the tibia bare; this is the source of *BIWP*'s comment. Such flimsy evidence takes no account of age, sex or regional variation. Field identification can carry us only so far. Laurel Tucker's letter, I respectfully submit, attempts to carry us much too far.

Finally, if the illustrations are a true representation of the birds seen, then the one on the left is not a Cattle Egret. No race of *Bubulcus ibis* has a straight upper mandible. If, as suggested, it was an escapee, then it may have been a hybrid. Zoos go in for that sort of thing.

JAMES HANCOCK

Brookside, Back Street, St Cross, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 9SB

My note was intended as an encouragement to other birdwatchers to look more carefully at winter Cattle Egrets. It may or may not be possible to assign every such bird to its correct race, but James Hancock seems to suggest that, if you can't be right every time, why bother to try at all?

If a striking difference is noted from one observation, then it is surely worth following up? Grahame Walbridge has since informed me that he also finds the structural differences between the two races obvious, and his



observations are based on thousands of sightings in Southeast Asia. Measurements, taxonomic and skeletal evidence can, strange as it may seem, be downright misleading, as they do not always give an accurate picture of the relative proportions of a bird in the field.

The illustration of the Slimbridge Cattle Egret shows the bird's head slightly front-on, as it was sketched at the time, which is why the upper mandible appears less decurved. If James Hancock believes it may have been a hybrid, then, bearing in mind its plumage pattern and colour, I wonder what its parentage might be?

Modern identification techniques and abilities are improving all the time. Greater emphasis is being placed on jizz and, nowadays, bird-watchers attempt to identify species which they would not have identified in the past (for example, separating Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus* from Chiffchaffs *P. collybita*). I'm not saying we'll get it right every time, but we'll learn and improve only if we try.

LAUREL A. TUCKER

James Hancock's letter was written in December 1985, and the late Laurel Tucker's reply in May 1986. We have published both almost unchanged. Eds

**Decline of certain winter visitors** Several species which are predominantly winter visitors to Derbyshire seem to me to have become considerably scarcer in recent years compared with a few years ago. To see how true this is, I have extracted information from the annual *Derbyshire Bird Report*, published by the Derbyshire Ornithological Society, for the period 1970-84, and divided this into three five-year periods. For the scarcer species, all records of which were published, I have attempted to assess the likely numbers of individuals involved. For Jack Snipe *Limnocryptes minimus* and Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*, which were too numerous for all records to be published, I have averaged the largest flocks seen each year, which should give some indication of relative abundance.

**Table 1. Numbers of certain winter visitors occurring in Derbyshire in five-year periods, 1970-84**

	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84
Rock Pipit	112	67	25
<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>			
Waxwing	1,431	60	0
<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>			
Great Grey Shrike	70	54	27
<i>Lanius excubitor</i>			
Carriion Crow of 'hooded' race	11	11	2
<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>			
Snow Bunting	24	37	7
<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>			
AVERAGE ANNUAL LARGEST FLOCK			
Jack Snipe	11.2	7.2	5.0
<i>Limnocryptes minimus</i>			
Brambling	774	594	420
<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>			

These figures may be even more significant when we consider that the number of observers contributing to the annual report increased by some 70% between 1970 and 1984.

How widespread are these apparent declines, and what are the reasons for them?

R. A. FROST

66 St Lawrence Road, North Wingfield, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S42 5LL

## Announcements

**BTO bargain** Are you a BTO member? If not, take the opportunity to join now (a membership leaflet is inserted with this issue). Ordinary subscription rates rise to £12 in January, but by joining now you will receive 15 months' membership for just £10. The address to write to is BTO, Beech Grove, Tring, Hertfordshire HP23 5NR.

**New Behaviour Notes Panel member** We are delighted that Dr Ian Newton has accepted our invitation to join the Behaviour Notes Panel. Dr Newton replaces Dr Hilary Fry, who has now left Aberdeen University to take up a new post at the Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. We should like to thank Dr Fry for his most valuable advice and enthusiasm as a Notes Panel member over the past dozen years.

**New books in British BirdShop** In addition to the continuing special offer concerning *The Frontiers of Bird Identification* and a much-reduced price for Michael Warren's *Shorelines*, we can now also offer the following new books:

Cleeves *A Bird in the Hand* (Century)

Génsbøl *Birds of Prey of Britain and Europe, North Africa and the Middle East* (Collins)

Goodwin *Crows of the World* (Brit. Mus., Nat. Hist.) 2nd edn

Harbard *Quiz Book of Birds: evenings at the 'Coot and Corncrake'* (Collins)

Hayman & Burton *The Birdlife of Britain & Europe* (Mitchell Beazley) New edn

Hutchinson *Watching Birds in Ireland* (Country House)

Soper *The Bird Table Book* (David & Charles) 5th edn

Please use the form on page xiii now.

## Reviews

**Which Bird? Birds of Britain and Europe.** By Jim Flegg with Eric and David Hosking. Deans International Publishing, London, 1986. 256 pages; over 400 colour plates; 17 colour illustrations. £7.95.

The first thing to say about this book is that it is fantastic value for money. It is crammed with



superb—and superbly reproduced—colour photographs, looks as if it ought to be selling at around £25.00, yet costs only £7.95 (available only from W H Smith).

Although the author is named first, the publishers surely intend this book as a vehicle for the photographs by Eric & David Hosking. In general, each species receives a quarter of a page, with a colour photograph (usually rather smaller than one would have wished) and a dozen-or-so lines of text beneath. By far the majority of the photographs are by the two named photographers, but some of the gaps are filled with photographs by another 18 bird photographers. The standard of all these is consistently high. There remain, however, some odd omissions. For instance, although Syrian Woodpecker has a photograph and text, there is no illustration of Shore Lark; some races are 'in' (e.g. 'Blue-headed Wagtail' *M. f. flava*, 'White Wagtail' *M. a. alba* and 'St Kilda Wren' *T. t. hirtensis*), but important species such as Great Skua and Pomarine Skua are 'out'. These omissions make the book quite unsatisfactory as a field guide (which is what it seems to pretend to be, with its short species-texts and species-by-species arrangement). Even worse than the omission of illustrations for some species is the plugging of some gaps by paintings, none of which is pleasing to my eye, and some of which look like amateurish paintings of dead birds propped up or laid out on a table; they clash with the excellent photographs, and the book would have been better without them.

In its design, layout and concept, this book has nothing to offer the sophisticated *British Birds* reader. For a wonderful collection of magnificently reproduced colour photographs, however, at an extraordinarily low price, every *British Birds* reader should consider dashing out to his or her nearest W H Smith branch to snap up a copy of this book while it is still available.

J. T. R. SHARROCK

**The Pheasants of the World. By Paul A. Johnsgard.** Colour plates by Major Henry Jones (51) and T. Greenwood (2). OUP, Oxford, 1986. 300 pages; 53 colour plates; many line-drawings; 24 distribution maps. £42.50.

This book has the same title, *The Pheasants of the World*, as Jean Delacour's 1951 (revised 1977) treatise on this group of gamebirds. This present volume includes information and references up to 1984, and concentrates more on the species and their habits and behaviour than on racial differences. The colour paintings, by Major Henry Jones, were 'discovered' in the archives of the Zoological Society of London, and are published here for the first time. Although painted 80-odd years ago, they illustrate well (and evocatively) the plumages (usually both male and female) of this colourful group. If peafowls were not common safari-park/zoo/ornamental-garden birds, and the Pheasant was not a taken-for-granted feature of the English countryside, this whole group would surely be more highly rated by ordinary birdwatchers. As it is, those who seek them in their natural Asian habitats regard the shy and difficult-to-observe pheasants as real prizes, and a male Lady Amherst's Pheasant at dawn in Bedfordshire woodland (truly feral, since it is really wild) takes a lot of beating. This book devotes little space to the feral British populations, however, but will be valued by all those interested in this group, and makes an excellent addition to the series of such treatments by Professor Johnsgard. It has been well produced by Oxford University Press; a book to be cherished.

J. T. R. SHARROCK

**The Birds of Yorkshire. By J. R. Mather.** Croom Helm, London, 1986. 624 pages; 119 black-and-white plates; 96 line-drawings; 35 maps. £40.00.

This new review of the avifauna of the whole of the old county of Yorkshire is split into two sections: a series of short introductory chapters, on previous authors Nelson & Chislett, the Yorkshire environment, development of ornithology and bird protection, Yorkshire bird photographers and some sites of special interest, followed by the main part, 561 pages devoted to the systematic list. The choice of 'sites of special interest' seems to be rather ringing-oriented and several well-known and important ornithological sites are not mentioned, the most obvious probably being Flamborough Head, surely one of the foremost sites in the county.

The plates again are split into a series on Yorkshire habitats, sites and characters (54), and birds (65). Of the latter, there are 19 of the aesthetically displeasing 'bird-in-the-hand' and another 11 of dead birds, a seemingly poor reflection of modern Yorkshire bird-photography.

The systematic list is broken by 96 line-drawings by three artists: Ray Hawley, Mark Whorley and Ian Wallace. Most are pleasant, the Tengmalm's Owl a direct copy of one of the plates, while those of Ian Wallace (I found only seven) were consistently the most inspiring.

The introduction to the main text suggests that all records to the end of 1984 are included, but there appear to be notable gaps in some species and for some areas for that year. The list itself includes 404 fully accepted species, another seven 'with some claim to be Yorkshire birds'—including Bald Eagle, Swallow-tailed Kite and Blue-tailed Bee-eater!—with another ten species formerly accepted but now rejected. Species accounts range from just a few lines to four pages, averaging one to 1½, and include where appropriate the historical records of Nelson & Chislett followed by an often-very-full summary of records culled from the annual County Bird Reports for 1940-82/83, a statement on present status, ringing recoveries, local names and interesting facets of behaviour and records of birds with aberrant plumage. Updated 10-km atlas maps are included for some species with a restricted breeding range. Many of the accounts of historical records are presented in detail and make fascinating reading, while a good percentage of the records, throughout, are credited to the original observers. Relevant references to records are included, and many rarities receive fuller-than-normal treatment. All such rarity records from Flamborough Head for 1978 onwards have been accepted by the YNU Records Committee but have not been submitted to the *British Birds* Rarities Committee, but this is not always stated.

In total, the information included per species is much more comprehensive than in any comparable county avifauna that I have seen, and the text is generally well written and readable, with the exception of the 'numbers-places-dates' records from recent annual reports. The historical accounts in particular make compelling reading for anyone having an interest in British ornithology and not possessing the earlier works. Inevitably in a work of this magnitude, there are mistakes and, even to a 'casual visitant' on a brief review, I came across a number of incorrect dates, a Spoonbill aged by 20 years, Peterborough in Nottinghamshire, and some notable omissions (e.g. Black-browed Albatross at Flamborough in 1974, *Brit. Birds* 68: 309; and Little Egret at Potteric Carr, 69: 328).

Despite the criticism, however, this is a valuable treatise on the birds of our largest county and a welcome addition to the more recent revised county avifaunas. The very high price is unjustified I feel; but is it preferable to see such a work in print at a high cost rather than gathering seven years' dust through lack of a publisher like the new *Birds of Lincolnshire*?

GRAHAM P. CATLEY

**The Sparrowhawk.** By Ian Newton. T. & A. D. Poyser, Calton, 1986. 396 pages; 90 figures; 63 tables; 24 black-and-white plates. £16.00.

Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus* are elusive, nest inconveniently in trees, and are relatively uncommon. They are not the most convenient birds to study. Ian Newton and colleagues worked on them for 14 years in southern Scotland. Nearly 10,000 prey items, 1,389 nests, 57 individuals radio-tagged and many individuals known throughout their lives form the source of much of the book. The Sparrowhawk is now one of the best-studied raptors in the world. On many general topics, it will be cited beside important findings from species less awkward to study.

Much of this work has already been published, in nearly 30 scientific papers. A monograph has allowed some updating, but, more importantly, gives coherence to the story. Supporting anecdote fills gaps where sufficient data are not available to meet the demands of the heavy journals. Unlike many single-species books, this one is purposeful throughout. Neither tedious description nor fringe material is needed for padding. This is a remarkable study, and its publication as a book does it the justice of making it available to more readers.

The oddest thing about Sparrowhawks is the extent of the size difference between the sexes. Female raptors are generally larger than males, but the Sparrowhawk is extreme, with a near two-fold difference. Males defend territories which vary in quality. They provide most of the food for nesting females and later for the young as well. Successful reproduction depends on a good male in a good territory. Such males are a scarce resource, only in part because they are less long lived and thus less abundant than females. Contrary to the more common circumstances, females compete for access to males and may therefore benefit from larger size. The extent of dimorphism in raptors is related to the agility required in hunting. Size differences and their consequences pervade most chapters of the lives of Sparrowhawks.



Ian Newton writes with direct style. Chapters start with an outline of what they are going to say, often formulated as a question of general biological interest. Just as helpfully, they conclude with a summary. Rather than a catalogue of facts or observations, what comes in between is often set in a context of enquiry which develops as a story. More than one plausible idea can usually be imagined to account for a particular observation. In the worst writing, these are often stated with emphasis on those favoured by the author, and the unwary reader can readily be deceived. None of this here. Ian Newton is careful to describe the credible hypotheses that might explain a particular observation and to seek the kinds of observation or experiment which could most readily support or refute each of them. The style is so straightforward as to make the scientific force look simple.

The quality of the text is supported by much illustration. Many points are made by figures on the same page. Still-more information is given in tables grouped at the end. The cost of this device to conceal a shock of numbers is that it is difficult to study a table while reading the related text. A series of delightful sketches adorn chapter headings. Keith Brockie paints with observation and humour. A just-fledged thrush is totally unaware that it has seconds to live, but, a few chapters later, the Sparrowhawk is itself victim to a grimly determined Goshawk. There are two groups of illuminating black-and-white photographs.

It has become a commonplace to congratulate Poyzers on the quality and reasonable price of their books. The comment is no less deserved for all its repetition. Reviewers often seem determined to find a quibble or two, especially in a book otherwise favourably portrayed. I do not applaud this ploy, but could not find one anyway. This is a work of masterly content, a very good read, and a thoroughly nice book to own. Readers who like birds of prey or know the work of Ian Newton should already have a copy. If you are unsure, or rarely read a serious bird book, try this and you should not be disappointed.

COLIN J. BIBBY

## Short reviews

**Species-checklist of the Birds of New Guinea.** By **Bruce M. Beehler and Brian W. Finch.** (Royal Australian Ornithologists' Union, 1985. Paperback, Aus. \$10.00.) This 128-page checklist standardises and cross-references the English and scientific names of the region, and provides the basis of taxonomy and nomenclature for the long-awaited forthcoming field guide. Distribution will be covered in the field guide, so is not dealt with here. [S. J. M. GANTLETT] **Limicoles Nicheurs de France.** By **Philippe J. Dubois & Roger Mahéo.** (Ministère de l'Environnement, Ligue Française pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO) and Bureau International de la Recherche sur les Oiseaux d'Eau (IWRB), 1986. Paperback 100F.) This attractive book stems from a BTO-type enquiry into the status and distribution of nesting waders throughout France, carried out during 1983-84. The report goes far beyond a simple presentation of results, however, and will be a useful reference also for more-general students. The 13, long species accounts each include discussion of the world and West Palearctic contexts, as well as distribution, historical and present status, habitat,

breeding biology, and conservation measures needed within France. All but four non-wetland species (Stone-curlew, Woodcock, Collared Pratincole and Dotterel) are covered. General chapters summarise the species accounts and wader biogeography. There is a strong call for a shorter hunting season for Lapwings, and for site-protection for some other declining species. [JOHN MARCHANT] **Birds of Trinidad and Tobago.** By **Richard ffrench.** (Macmillan Caribbean, 1986. Paperback £3.75.) This attractive, beginner's guide describes 83 of Trinidad and Tobago's commoner species, each one illustrated by a colour photograph almost all of which are of high quality. Hopefully, its comparatively low price should make it available to many of the local people, stimulating a healthy interest in the islands' exotic birdlife. An excellent starter for anyone birding in Trinidad and Tobago, though the more serious will also need the same author's *A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*. [DAVID FISHER] **Seashore Birds.** By **Peter Gill.** (Dinosaur Publications, 1986. Paperback, £1.25; hardback £2.95.) A 24-page booklet which could well spark an interest in a five- to nine-year old. **British**

**Pyralid Moths: a guide to their identification.** By **Barry Goater.** (Harley Books, 1986. £18.95.) The family Pyralidae has been neglected in recent lepidopterous literature, 35 years having elapsed since Beirne's *British Pyralid and Plume Moths*. In concisely summarising all present knowledge of 208 species, the author has highlighted the gaps in our knowledge: this should stimulate field enthusiasts. The eight excellent plates depict all species on the British list, photographed in colour. A splendid book. [J. N. DYMOND]

**The Cormorant.** By **Stephen Gregory.** (Heinemann, 1986. £9.50.) The story of a pet Cormorant inherited from an eccentric uncle. A dark, unpleasant tale; definitely not for children (nor for me). [ERIKA SHARROCK]

**Urban Foxes.** By **Stephen Harris.** (Whittet Books, 1986. £4.95.) With foxes living under my suburban studio, I opened this book hopefully and with many questions. I was not disappointed and my queries were answered. Well illustrated by Guy Troughton, this is delightful, good value and recommended. [ROBERT GILLMOR] **What's That Bird?: a guide to British and Continental birds.** By **Peter Hayman and Michael Everett with additional material by R. A. Hume and N. W. Cusa.** (RSPB, 1986. £8.95.) Of the 80 pages in this book, 65 are crammed with tiny sketchbook-like paintings by Peter Hayman, annotated with useful identification notes. There can be very few European birdwatchers to whom these would not provide many fascinating snippets of information. For these alone, the book is to be thoroughly recommended to all *British Birds* readers. Indeed, these illustrations are likely to be more useful to the experienced birdwatcher than to a beginner, since they are scattered in a somewhat haphazard fashion (e.g. the hirundines are on pages 25, 61, 72 and 76). The 33-page first edition, published in 1978, cost only £1.25 and, at that time, was given free to anyone joining the RSPB (see review: *Brit. Birds* 72: 234-235). **The Biology and Management of the River Dee.** Edited by **David Jenkins.** (Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, 1985. Paperback, £6.00.) These proceedings stem from a symposium which sought to describe and reconcile the needs of different interests, including conservation, fisheries, farming and forestry, in the major river system of 'Royal Deeside'. The content is fairly technical, and includes some interesting

information on riparian birds and riverside bat roosts. [KENNETH TAYLOR] **Learn to Paint Wildlife.** By **Martin Knowelden.** (Collins, 1985. £4.95.) After four pages about the artist and his approach to painting wildlife, and a couple entitled 'Why Paint Wildlife', Martin Knowelden goes into detail on equipment and techniques. This section is full of helpful advice on materials and methods. Mammals, fish, butterflies and birds are each considered and such topics as anatomy, form, proportion and patterns, movement, field notes, composition and drawing in the field are discussed, illustrated with examples of the author's own work. I felt more in tune with the author's words than with some of his finished works. Maybe the quality of the colour reproduction has not done justice to the originals. [ROBERT GILLMOR] **Birdwatching.** By **Steve Madge.** (Kingfisher Books, 1986. Paperback £2.50.) This revised edition has none of the small, irritating errors present in the original 1980 hardback (reviewed *Brit. Birds* 73: 600). The diagram of 'Parts of a bird' is, however, woefully inadequate (only 13 parts are labelled, two of them wrongly, and one arrow has no label at all). Careless production of this sort mars a book which otherwise could be wholeheartedly recommended. **Heidelerche und Haubenlerche.** By **Rudolf Pätzold.** (Die Neue Brehm-Bücherei 440. A Ziemsen Verlag, 1986. DM22.70.) A 184-page 'double monograph' in this excellent German series, covering Woodlark *Lullula arborea* and Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*. With 125 figures and tables, including 60 photographs, this book provides an invaluable summary of knowledge on these species, though it is a pity that there are no English summaries. Heidelerche is literally 'Heath Lark', perhaps a more apt vernacular name than Woodlark. [HUMPHREY SITTERS] **RSPB The Birdwatcher's Logbook.** (Collins Willow Books, 1986. £7.95.) A book designed for the beginner birdwatcher, with many blank pages for filling in details of personal observations. There are also short articles on how to take field notes, basic information about migration, recording the weather, what equipment is needed by a birdwatcher, and so on. Any book which starts novice birdwatchers off in the right direction and with a sensible grounding is to be welcomed.



# News and comment

*Mike Everett and Robin Prytherch*

**Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'**

**Ornithologists honoured** Our congratulations to Ian Prestt, Director General of the RSPB, who was created a CBE in the Birthday Honours List; and to Professor George Dunnet, well known at Aberdeen University and for his work on seabirds and in Shetland, who was made an OBE.

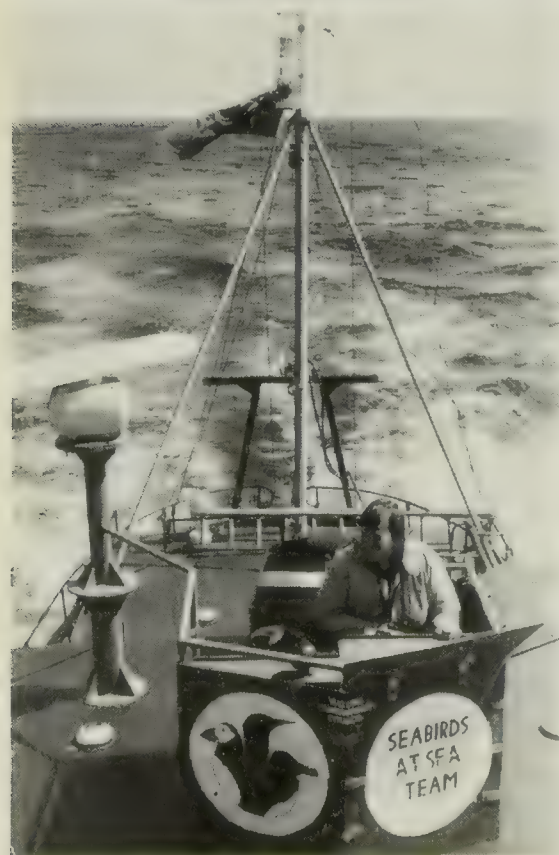
**Sir Derek again** We were pleased to learn that Sir Derek Barber has been reappointed Chairman of the Countryside Commission, for a third successive term which ends in December 1989. It is good to know that this important body has at its head a man whose considerable experience and expertise is strongly influenced by his knowledge of wildlife conservation and his interest in ornithology.

**Seabirds at sea** A small team of NCC scientists—Mark Tasker, Andy Webb, Stuart Benn and Craig Burton—has started work on a new seabird survey off the coasts of

northwest Scotland (plate 266). Having completed a survey in the North Rona/Sula Sgeir area (where they detected a surprising increase in the numbers of Guillemots *Uria aalge*), they moved on to look at the seas between Orkney and the North Rockall Trough. An atlas showing the main areas of seabird concentrations at different seasons is proposed once the fieldwork is over. We look forward to more news of this project in due course. It forms part of the ongoing programme of NCC's Seabirds At Sea team, which began work in 1979. The latest phase has been funded by the NCC, BP, the Department of Energy and the Department of Transport Marine Pollution Control Unit.

**Cape Clear bookings** Kieran Grace, Bookings Secretary for Cape Clear Bird Observatory, has asked us to publicise his new address: 84 Dorney Court, Shankill, Co. Dublin, Ireland.

**266.** 'Seabirds at sea': Stuart Benn observes seabirds from SV *Ocean Bounty*, June 1986  
(Mark Tasker, NCC)



**Bull Island** An exciting new educational centre, built by Dublin Corporation at Bull Island, one of Ireland's premier wetland haunts, was officially opened on 9th March, coinciding with the annual Irish Wildbird Conservancy Open Day, when the people of Dublin were invited to 'Discover Birds at Bull Island'. About 2,000 members of the public saw the new centre and joined in guided walks organised by IWC volunteers. At the opening ceremony, IWC Chairman, Maurice Bryan, congratulated the Corporation on its 'courage and vision in becoming the first local authority in Ireland to establish a major wildlife educational facility.' He recalled that, through the efforts of one of Ireland's greatest ornithologists, Father P. G. Kennedy, SJ, North Bull became Ireland's first official bird sanctuary in 1931. In *An Irish Sanctuary* (1953), Father Kennedy expressed the hope that one day 'the island would become a national centre of educational and cultural interest of which all Irishmen would be proud'.

The new centre contains an extensive exhibition area, with a series of illustrated panels which describe the natural history of Bull Island. A video film on the waders of the Bull Island, made by IWC President, Éamon



227. 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' and 'The Richard Richardson Award' winners, 1986. Left to right, Timothy Hinley (RRA winner), Keith Shackleton (judge), Chris Rose (Bird Illustrator of the Year), Nik Borrow (second), John Davis (third), Robert Gillmor (judge) and Dr Tim Sharrock (judge) (R. J. Chandler)

de Buítléar, is available for showing to visitors, as is a tape-slide presentation. A rota of IWC volunteers supports Corporation Staff in manning the centre at weekends. The centre is open daily from 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. Special arrangements for visiting schools or other groups may be made by contacting Dublin Corporation, Parks Department, Bedford Lodge, Mount Prospect Avenue, Dublin 3 (tel. Dublin 331941).

**Imperial tradition** The Emperor of Japan's interest in wildlife is well known. It is pleasing to report, therefore, that the tradition continues: His Highness Prince Aya, second son of the Crown Prince, was elected President of the Yamashina Institute for Ornithology in June this year.

**Raptor Conference** Eilat provides an exciting venue for the Third World Conference on Birds of Prey, which will be held during 22nd-27th March 1987 under the joint auspices of the World Working Group on Birds of Prey, the Israel Raptor Information Center and the US Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association. Further details from Robin Chancellor, 15 Bolton Gardens, London SW5 0AL.

**Bird Illustrator of the Year** Sponsored this year, for the first time, by the Natural History Book Service, the award ceremony for Bird Illustrator of the Year was attended by 90 artists, their guests and members of the Press. As usual, the reception was held at The Mall Galleries, in association with the Federation of British Artists and the Society of Wildlife Artists. The ceremony was introduced by Robert Gillmor, President of the SWLA and one of the competition's judges, and the award presentations were made by Keith Shackleton, Past President of the SWLA and also one of the BIY judges (plate 227). This annual occasion provides a delightful opportunity to meet many of Britain's most talented bird artists in congenial surroundings. *British Birds* is most grateful to all those concerned, and especially to the SWLA and the competition's sponsors, the Natural History Book Service.

As Robert Gillmor pointed out, *British Birds* and the judges are especially keen that more young artists should submit entries for The Richard Richardson Award, which is open to those aged under 21. If you know an up-and-coming bird-illustrator, please bring this competition to his or her attention. Entry is not limited to *British Birds* subscribers.



**BIY winners elected to SWLA** At the AGM of the Society of Wildlife Artists, held after the BB/NHBS Press reception (see above), two previous winners of the title Bird Illustrator of the Year, Alan Harris (1982) and Martin Woodcock (1983), were among five artists elected to membership of the Society.

**Woodcock's work** We asked Martin Woodcock, winner of the title 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' in 1983, what he had been up to lately. He has supplied the following news: 'I revisited Thailand for the first time in 20 years this January and it was wonderful to meet old friends again. I have just started work on the colour plates for volume 4 of *Birds of Africa* (vol. 3 was finished in 1983), having had a four-month study trip there to look at the passerines; my wife, Barbara, and I shall be back there in the autumn, as I'm in one of the two British Teams for 'Birdwatch Kenya 1986', and with much hospitality on offer we shall probably stay on for a month or so—more work of course. My first trip to the USA happens this month, when we have a month around the International Congress. Also, I am showing work for the first time in the States this year at the 'Birds in Art' exhibition, so we have to go back there again at the beginning of September for the preview and parties, which should be most interesting. Last autumn, I held a three-day exhibition here at home, which was a great success—a virtual sell-out—and am hoping to have a one-man show in London in about two years time.' His recent election to the SWLA is noted above.

**Ted Ellis** East Anglia—and Norwich and Norfolk in particular—will not be quite the same without Dr Ted Ellis, who died in July, aged 77, after a major operation. He would probably have disliked being termed a 'bird-watcher' (he certainly was not a 'birder!'), for, while he certainly watched birds, he was essentially an all-round naturalist of the old school. His knowledge was truly encyclopaedic, and one of his best assets was the wonderfully enthusiastic and always informative way that he showed it to us, most notably in recent years through his regular TV spots. His 'New Naturalist' on the Norfolk Broads is a small masterpiece. He will be greatly missed, and our deepest sympathies go to his family.

**OSME AGM** The 8th AGM of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East was held at the Natural History Museum, London, on 28th June, 1986. Despite the distinctly Middle Eastern temperatures and a large political rally, which effectively snarled up most of London's traffic, there was a very good turn-out and everyone was treated to three excellent talks.

Mike Rands presented the film of last autumn's OSME Expedition to North Yemen, followed by a slide talk on some of the conservation problems facing the country's wildlife. The film included a sequence on displaying Arabian Bustards *Ardeotis arabs*, which was spectacular and the first time that this behaviour had been filmed, and it gave many of us a first chance to see some of the Arabian endemics. Perhaps one of the most exciting finds of the expedition was a group of Bald Ibises *Geronticus eremita*, including two immatures, which may possibly indicate a small breeding colony somewhere in the North Yemen. Mike's talk demonstrated that, like everywhere else in the region, there are problems facing the wildlife, mainly through reclamation and development, but in general the Yemen people seem to be living alongside their wildlife without too much conflict.

Continuing the 'Yemen' flavour, Hassan Felemban gave a superbly illustrated talk on the birds of South Western Saudi Arabia, concentrating mainly on the endemic species. His photographs of birds such as Arabian Accentor *Prunella fagani*, Arabian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos dora*, Yemen Thrush *Turdus menachensis* and Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus socotranus* in the hand were truly stunning. The diversity of habitats in a relatively small area makes this region an exciting place to visit, and, with Hassan soon to return to Saudi, we look forward to hearing more of his pioneering works in the future.

The afternoon was rounded off by Charles Pilcher talking about 'Birds and Conservation in Kuwait'. Having started by claiming not to know much about birds, Charles then went on to show us some of the country's wealth of birds with some truly amazing slides—these were enough to whet my appetite to visit the area and I'm sure I was not the only one in the audience to be so affected! Hopefully, the Kuwait authorities will be keen to create nature reserves, although the current political situation in this part of the world does little to help the conservation cause at present. (Contributed by Geoff Welch)

**Sandgrouse** The seventh issue of *Sandgrouse* is now available (price £7.00) from OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL. Major papers include 'The breeding birds of the lakes in the Nile Delta', 'Raptor ringing at Eilat', 'Notes on seabirds in south-eastern Arabia' and 'Blackstarts in Southern Oman'—as well as two on Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*.

**New reports** *The Birds of Christchurch Harbour, 1985*—now in its much better A5 format—includes the usual systematic list and other information for the year, as well as in-the-hand descriptions of the first Northern Parula *Parula americana* ringed in Britain and the Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* which, in the field, seemed to many to be an Arctic Warbler *P. borealis*. *Wildlife of the Sandwell Valley* is an enterprising publication from the Sandwell Valley Field Naturalists' Club, covering not only birds but also the area's general ecology and its flora and other wildlife. It costs £3.50 plus 28p postage and is available from the editor, M. G. Bloxham, 1 St Johns Close, Sandwell Valley, West Bromwich, West Midlands. The *Bardsey Observatory Report* for 1985 (no. 29) also contains papers on other fauna as well as the usual very detailed report on birds; it is available from Dr Dick Loxton, Department

of Zoology, Baines Wing, Leeds University, West Yorkshire LS2 9JT. Finally, the Argyll Bird Club has produced the *Third Argyll Bird Report* (covering the period up to January 1986), which has an impressive contents list, including notes on Argyll Barn Owls *Tyto alba*, Corncrakes *Crex crex* on Islay, and Argyll winter wader populations; it costs £3 including postage, and is obtainable from Colin Galbraith, 4 Achagoil, Minard, by Inveraray, Argyll.

**Congratulations, Ian!** Ian Dawson, our 'Recent-reporter' and the RSPB's long-time librarian, was married at Sittingbourne in Kent on 28th June. His wife, Louise, was a sandwich student at The Lodge in 1983-84. Ian and Louise successfully twitched English Golden Eagles when on honeymoon in the Dales and the Lake District. We wish them both every happiness.

**Hard work, this gull-watching** A recent overseas communication referred to that well-known British birder, Peter Grunt.

**Change of address of Recorder** The address for I. P. Gibson, Recorder for Strathclyde, is now c/o Beck, 1 Rosebank Terrace, Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire PA13 1EW.

## Recent reports

*Ian Dawson and Keith Allsopp*

**These are largely unchecked reports, not authenticated records**

The dates in this report refer to July unless otherwise stated.

The hot weather spilling over from Europe during June continued into early July. By 5th, the centre of pressure moved to the southwest, and temperatures dropped as cooler Atlantic air arrived from the northwest. Apart from a pulse of hot air from the south on 15th and 16th, the weather stayed changeable westerly until the end of the month.



### Seabirds

**A Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis* flying past South Stack on 20th June gave Anglesey its first record, and a **Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris diomedea* off Hilbre Island (Merseyside) four days later presaged the now annual late-summer passage of this species off Cornwall in late July: watchers at



Porthgwarra on 28th were rewarded with 32 **Cory's**, four **Great Shearwaters** *P. gravis* and 11 **Manx Shearwaters** *P. puffinus* of the Western Mediterranean race *mauretanicus* known as 'Balearic Shearwater'.

A **Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus* visited North Ronaldsay (Orkney) along with a **Little Gull** *Larus minutus* on 8th. A first-summer individual of the latter species was at Balranald (Western Isles) on 14th. **Mediterranean Gulls** *L. melanocephalus* were seen at Great Yarmouth (Norfolk), and throughout at Sellafield (Cumbria), whilst two different unseasonal **Glaucous Gulls** *L. hyperboreus* were at Hodbarrow (Cumbria) on 6th and 20th. An adult **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* in winter plumage remained elusive at Rosslare (Co. Wexford) from June to mid month, whilst in Orkney **Arctic Terns** *S. paradisaea* suffered a major breeding failure for the second successive year. There were, however, about 20 sightings of the 'portlandica' phase of the latter species in and around the Western Isles between 10th and 18th. Two (or the same?) adult **White-winged Black Terns** *Chlidonias leucopterus* were at Belfast (Co. Down) in the first week, and at Grimsport (Co. Down) on 11th, and, perhaps the same individual, at Woolston Eyes (Cheshire) on 13th.

### Large waterbirds

An adult **Red-necked Grebe** *Podiceps grisegena* was at Loch Achanalt, Wester Ross (Highland), on 12th, and another individual was a fine sight all month at Pitsford Reservoir (Northamptonshire), accompanied by a **Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia*. Another Spoonbill was an unusual visitor to Cresswell Pond (Northumberland) on 1st, while one at Blacktoft (Humberside) from 26th to 30th June was accompanied by a **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* on 28th, which presumably moved to Tetney (Lincolnshire) on 29th, part of an amazing collection of rarities to visit this corner of England in late June and July. Further Little Egrets graced East Tilbury (Essex), later moving to Cliffe (Kent), Orfordness (Suffolk), and Raven-glass (Cumbria) on 13th and 14th. A further June record of **Great White Egret** *E. alba* involved one at Camps Reservoir (Strathclyde) from 16th to 18th. Eight more late May and June **White Storks** *Ciconia ciconia* have come to light, whilst July records concerned one over Slimbridge (Gloucestershire) on 1st, and two at Brampton (Suffolk) mid month — a welcome return to form for this species.

A drake **Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* stayed at Woolston Eyes from 19th June into July, and a drake **Ferruginous Duck** *A. nyroca* returned to Allerton Bywater (West Yorkshire) for the fourth consecutive July. At opposite ends of Britain, a **Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina* on the Hayle Estuary (Cornwall) was more unusual but much less exciting than the **King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis* off Sumburgh Head (Shetland).

### Waders

Perhaps inevitably, this group of birds provided the main excitement of the month. After two further June **Black-winged Stilts** *Himantopus himantopus*, at Millbrook Lake (Cornwall) on 18th and Tetney on 19th, early July saw a notable movement of 510 **Whimbrels** *Numenius phaeopus* and 862 **Curlews** *N. arquata* over Fenham Flats (Northumberland) on 5th, on which date a **Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos* was on the Weaver Bend (Cheshire). Another was at Minsmere (Suffolk) mid month, and one on pools by Belfast Lough from 13th to at least 21st was, surprisingly, the only American wader in Ireland. Back on the east coast of England, a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* at Cley (Norfolk) from about 12th and a **White-rumped Sandpiper** *C. fuscicollis* at Snettisham (Norfolk) from 14th both remained into August. A summer-plumaged **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* was on The Wash near Holbeach St Matthew (Lincolnshire) from about 20th to 25th, and, further north, a **Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* visited Filey (North Yorkshire) on 26th. The Hauxley (Northumberland) **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* remained to 1st,



**Temminck's Stints** *C. temminckii* were at Woolston Eyes on 7th and Cley, with two there mid month, when a **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* dropped into Frodsham (Cheshire).

Meanwhile, back in the south Humber area, rumours turned into reality at Blacktoft with a superb summer-plumaged **Red-necked Stint** *C. ruficollis*, the first unimpeachable British and Irish record, from 22nd to 29th. At the same time, at the mouth of the river at Tetney, an adult **Lesser Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* of the soon-to-be-split dainty Pacific race *fulva* was, quite unbelievably, joined briefly by an adult of the North American race *P. d. dominica* on 27th, this latter leaving the *fulva*'s favourite muddy saltmarsh creek to join, more typically, a nearby flock of Golden Plovers *P. apricaria* on plough, remaining to at least 31st.

### Large insect-eaters

Three RSPB reserves played host to **Red-footed Falcons** *Falco vespertinus* in June: South Stack on 21st and 22nd, Titchwell (Norfolk) on 26th, and that place Tetney on 13th; but the only July report involved one at Winterton (Norfolk) on 12th. Three **Hobbies** *F. subbuteo* together on 10th were unusual as far north as Dorman's Pool, Teesmouth (Cleveland). **Alpine Swifts** *Apus melba* were seen at South Stack on 18th June, near Calne (Wiltshire) on 28th June, and at Bude (Cornwall) early in July, while late July produced a convincing report of a **Little Swift** *A. affinis* over Barking (Essex) on 30th, seen while the observer waited for his bus home!

Other belated reports concern a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** *Clamator glandarius* near St Catherine's Point (Isle of Wight) on 28th May, a **Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* on the Calf of Man on 6th June, and a **Little Owl** *Athene noctua* picked up dead in Co. Wicklow early in June, only the fifth Irish record.

June and July this year proved excellent months for **Quails** *Coturnix coturnix*, with widespread reports from England, including, for example, at least ten on West Sedgemoor (Somerset) and four at Bempton (Humber-side).

### Passerines

Late June reports involved further records of **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* at Sumburgh, **Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* at Gloucester (Gloucestershire) from 23rd to 27th, male and female



85.

**Subalpine Warblers** *Sylvia cantillans* trapped on the Calf of Man on 15th, the female remaining to 16th, and a **Scarlet Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* at North Somercotes (Lincolnshire)—next to Tetney—on 22nd, where there was also a **Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* at the end of July. There were 20 **Crossbills** *Loxia curvirostra* on The Lizard (Cornwall) early in the month, and a **Redwing** *Turdus iliacus* in a St Helens (Merseyside) garden on 12th was unseasonal. After reporting a Great Grey Shrike trapped in an Orkney garage a couple of years ago (*Brit. Birds* 77: 337), we now hear of a **Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* which flew into the lounge of a house in Gazeley (Suffolk) on 2nd where it proceeded to devour a sparrow!

### Latest news

After an exciting late August, early September was rather quiet, perhaps the most unexpected rarities being a male **King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis* in eclipse on Scolt Head Island (Norfolk) on 6th-7th and a **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* also on the North Norfolk coast, at Cley on 7th. There was the usual scatter of the more regular 'scarce migrants', such as **Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria*, with Portland Bill (Dorset) having a nice collection of **Barred Warbler**, **Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla* and **Ortolan Bunting** *Emberiza hortulana*, all on 7th; and there were one or two **Aquatic Warblers** *Acrocephalus paludicola* at Marazion Marsh (Cornwall).



# Monthly marathon

Sponsored by

**W**e can now reveal the identity of the bird in the first photograph (*Brit. Birds* 79: 364, plate 179). Entrants identified it as:

Skylark <i>Alauda arvensis</i>	(68%)
Woodlark <i>Lullula arborea</i>	(18%)
Lesser Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella rufescens</i>	(5%)
Oriental Skylark <i>A. gulgula</i>	(4%)
Thekla Lark <i>Galerida theklae</i>	(3%)
Lapland Bunting <i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>	(1%)

There were also a small number of entries naming it as Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*, Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*, Pechora Pipit *A. gustavi*, Meadow Pipit *A. pratensis*, and Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*.

It was indeed a Skylark, photographed by Richard T. Mills in Co. Cork in February 1986.

If you got the answer wrong, don't be too depressed, and *do* continue to enter each month. And if you have not yet entered, why not start now? There's a long way still to go, and we feel that it is far from certain that it will be photographs 1 to 10 which provide the winner of the SUNBIRD holiday with his or her winning, ten-in-a-row sequence.

Please read the rules carefully. Several entrants have failed to use postcards, so their entries have been disqualified. Some other would-be entrants have forgotten to put their names (and addresses) on their postcards.

**268.** 'Monthly marathon' competition. Photograph number 4. Identify this species. If you succeed with ten in a row, you could win a SUNBIRD holiday to North America, Africa or Southeast Asia (see rules on page 364 in July issue). Send your answer *on a postcard* to Monthly Marathon, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK43NJ, to arrive *by 15th November 1986*.



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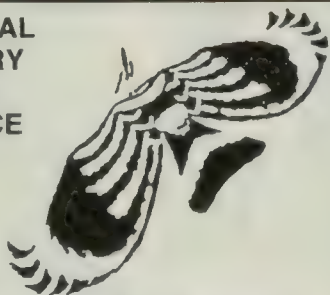
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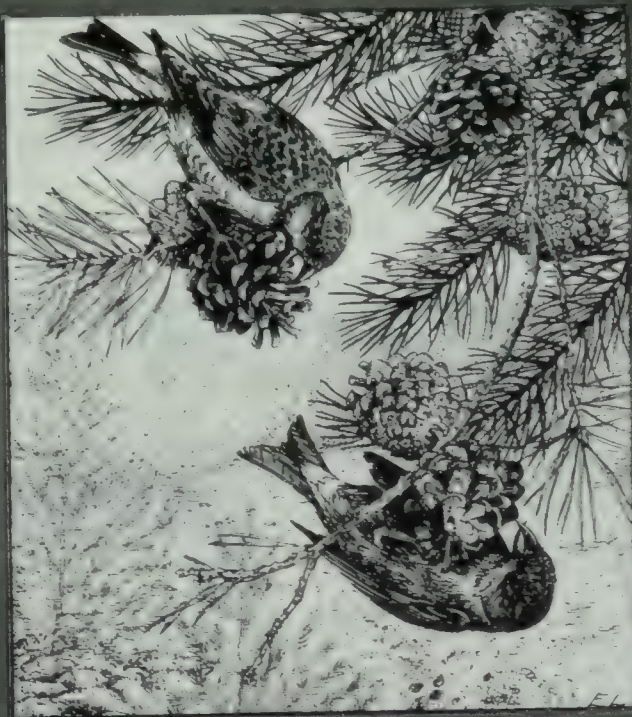
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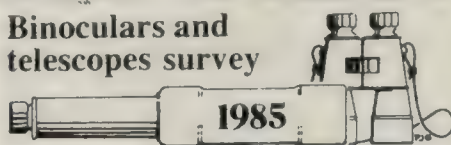
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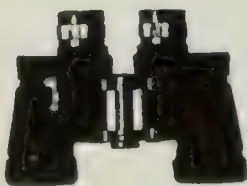
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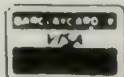
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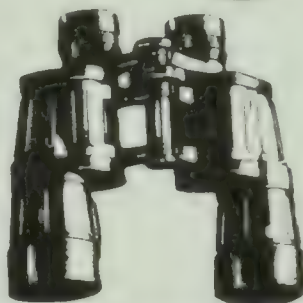
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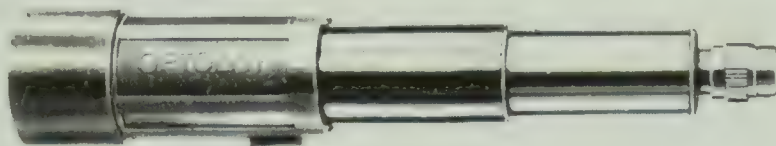
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# British Birds

Volume 79 Number 11 November 1986



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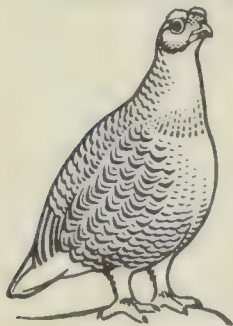
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*Publishing Manager,  
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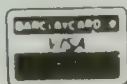
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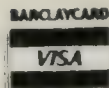
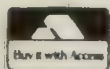
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# British Birds

VOLUME 79 NUMBER 11 NOVEMBER 1986



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**T**here are hundreds of natural history books around in the shops. All choices must be personal, but we think that these 65 are the pick of those currently available. They are all suitable as presents for a birdwatcher.

They are listed here from the cheapest to the most expensive.

- \* *A First Book of Birds* by Peter Holden, J. T. R. Sharrock & Norman Arlott (Macmillan) Paperback £1.25.  
Field guide for five- to nine-year-olds. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 78: 687)
- \* *Bill Oddie's Little Black Bird Book* by Bill Oddie (Methuen) £1.50  
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- \* *Evenings at the Coot and Corncrake* by Chris Harbard (Collins) Paperback £2.95  
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- \* *The Big Bird Race* by Bill Oddie & David Tomlinson (Collins) £3.95  
Competitive 24-hour birdwatch, as told by members of each team. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 76: 548)
- \* *The Birds of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East* by Herman Heinzel, Richard Fitter & John Parslow (Collins) Paperback £5.95 Hardback £6.95  
The field guide needed in North Africa and the Middle East. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 65: 445-448)
- \* *A Year of Bird Life* by Rob Hume & Sylvia Sullivan (RSPB) £4.95  
Splendid reading for teenage budding birders. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 151)

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\* These books can ALL be obtained through British Birds. If listed in British BirdShop on page xiii, just tick the appropriate box. If not listed, you can use the WRITE-IN lines on the British BirdShop list on page xiii.



- \* *Watching Birds in Ireland* by Clive Hutchinson (County House) Paperback £4.95  
Does for Ireland what John Gooders's *Where to Watch Birds* books have done for Britain.
- \* *Birds of Britain and Europe* by Bertel Bruun, Lars Svensson & Håkan Delin, illustrated by Arthur Singer and Dan Zetterström (Newnes Country Life Books) Paperback £5.95 Hardback £9.95  
Enormous improvement on previous versions; now one of the best field guides.
- \* *Wildlife in Towns and Cities, Gardens, Parks and Waterways* by Michael Chinery & W. G. Teagle (Country Life Books) Paperback £5.95  
Useful reference for identifying and finding out about wildlife other than birds. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 315-316)
- \* *The Garden Bird Book* edited by David Glue (Macmillan) Paperback £5.95  
Making your garden more attractive for birds, based on BTO research. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 75: 437-438)
- \* *Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland* by John Gooders & Alan Harris (Kingfisher Books) Paperback £5.95  
Excellent new field guide for beginners and others. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 453-454)
- \* *Portrait of a Country Artist: C. F. Tunnicliffe RA* by Ian Niall (Gollancz) Paperback £6.95  
Tunnicliffe fans are well served by books of his work. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 78: 685)
- \* *Gone Birding* by Bill Oddie (Methuen) £6.95  
Autobiographical adventures and escapades, often hilarious. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 76: 471)
- \* *The New Where to Watch Birds* by John Gooders (André Deutsch) £7.95  
Handy for the car: maps and describes good bird spots. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 362-363)
- \* *An Atlas of Birds of the Western Palearctic* by Colin Harrison (Collins) Originally £15.00, now £7.95  
Selected in 1982 as THE 'BRITISH BIRDS' BEST BIRD BOOK OF THE YEAR. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 75: 480)
- \* *A Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World* by Richard Howard & Alick Moore (Macmillan/OUP) Paperback £7.95 Hardback £25.00  
Perhaps the best of the world lists; well indexed. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 77: 280)
- \* *The Frontiers of Bird Identification* edited by J. T. R. Sharrock (British Birds) Paperback £9.95 (but £7.95 to *British Birds* subscribers)  
Identification papers reprinted from *British Birds*, now available as a paperback.
- \* *Shorelines* by Michael Warren (Hodder & Stoughton) Previously £14.95, now £7.95  
Featuring Michael Warren's distinctive style of paintings. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 77: 644)
- \* *Birds in Your Garden* by Nigel Wood (Hamlyn) £7.95  
Excellent advice; full of ideas. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 78: 470)
- \* *The Shell Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland* by James Ferguson-Lees, Ian Willis & J. T. R. Sharrock (Michael Joseph) £8.95  
Field guide covering British species. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 76: 370-371)
- \* *What's that Bird?* by Peter Hayman & Mike Everett (RSPB) £8.95  
Filled with identification snippets. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 513)

- \* *Confessions of a Scilly Birdman* by the late David Hunt (Croom Helm) £8.95  
Autobiography. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 78: 687-688)
- \* *A Field Guide to the Birds of South-East Asia* by Ben King, E. C. Dickinson & Martin Woodcock (Collins) £8.95  
Over 1,100 species.
- \* *Newman's Guide to the Birds of Southern Africa* by Kenneth Newman (Macmillan) £8.95  
David Fisher's review said 'The best field guide to African birds'. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 78: 688-689)
- \* *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* by Roger Tory Peterson, Guy Mountfort & P. A. D. Hollom (Collins) £8.95  
Still THE field guide. (Reviews: *Brit. Birds* 47: 62-64; 76: 603-604)
- \* *A Bird in the Hand* by Ann Cleeves (Century) £9.95  
Whodunnit, set in the twitching scene. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 600)
- \* *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* by National Geographic Society £9.95  
Single-volume field guide covering the whole of North America. Selected in 1984 as THE 'BRITISH BIRDS' BEST BIRD BOOK OF THE YEAR. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 77: 172-173)
- \* *The Bird Table Book* by Tony Soper (David & Charles) £9.95  
The fifth edition, and it's still exceedingly readable and useful, despite its inappropriate title.
- \* *The Popular Handbook of British Birds* by P. A. D. Hollom (Witherby) £11.50  
Habitat, food, habits, nests, and distribution, as well as identification. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 56: 154-155)
- \* *Tunnicliffe's Birdlife* by Noel Cusa (Orbis) Paperback £12.00  
The artist considered by many to have been The Master. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 452-453)
- \* *Flight Identification of European Raptors* by R. F. Porter, Bent Pors Nielsen & Steen Christensen (T. & A. D. Poyser) £12.00  
Classic guide. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 67: 520-521)
- \* *The Birdlife of Britain and Europe* by Peter Hayman & Philip Burton (Mitchell Beazley) £12.95  
Strangely arranged, but lots of useful identification material for the beginner.
- \* *The Countryside in Winter* by Brian Jackman & Bruce Pearson (Hutchinson) £12.95  
Featuring Bruce Pearson's paintings. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 317-318)
- \* *Travel Diaries of a Naturalist* by Peter Scott (Collins) vols. 1 & 2 £12.95 per volume  
Autobiographical episodes, beautifully illustrated. (Reviews: *Brit. Birds* 77: 132; 78: 466)
- \* *The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding* edited by John Farrand Jr (Audubon Society) vols. 1-3 £13.95 per volume  
Detailed identification guides to North American birds. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 77: 441-442)
- \* *Gulls: a guide to identification* by P. J. Grant (T. & A. D. Poyser) £14.00  
Classic; essential if you're serious. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 75: 437-438)



- \* *The Secret Life of an Oakwood* by Stephen Dalton with Jill Bailey (Century) £14.95  
Stunning photographs of scenes, animals and plants in a Sussex oakwood through the seasons.
- \* *Collins Guide to the Birds of Prey of Britain and Europe, North Africa and the Middle East* by Benny Génsbøl (Collins) £14.95  
Much useful information drawn together in one volume.
- \* *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa* by Gordon Lindsay Maclean, Kenneth Newman & Geoff Lockwood (John Voelcker) £14.95  
Fifth edition, totally revised and reillustrated. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 78: 466)
- \* *Wildlife and Wilderness: an artist's world* by Keith Shackleton (Clive Holloway) £15.00  
Fifty of Keith Shackleton's magnificent paintings, with a witty, interesting text.
- \* *Oxford Illustrated Encyclopedia. The Natural World* by Malcolm Coe (OUP) £15.95  
Useful reference. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 78: 685)
- \* *The Sparrowhawk* by Ian Newton (T. & A. D. Poyser) £16.00  
Splendid monograph by a scientist who writes really well. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 511-512)
- \* *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* compiled by J. T. R. Sharrock (T. & A. D. Poyser) £16.00  
Every breeding species precisely mapped: the work of 10,000 birdwatchers. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 70: 65-68)
- \* *Owls of Europe* by Heimo Mikkola & Ian Willis (T. & A. D. Poyser) £16.80  
'... the finest book on owls ever published' Stanley Cramp (*Brit. Birds* 77: 86)
- \* *The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland* by Peter Lack (T. & A. D. Poyser) £19.00  
Companion to *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland*.
- \* *The Bee-eaters* by C. H. Fry (T. & A. D. Poyser) £19.60  
Every species; fascinating; well-written. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 78: 207-208)
- \* *Seabirds: an identification guide* (2nd edn) by Peter Harrison (Croom Helm) £19.95  
Covers all the world's species. Selected in 1983 as THE 'BRITISH BIRDS' BEST BIRD BOOK OF THE YEAR. (Reviews: *Brit. Birds* 76: 371-372; 79: 268)
- \* *Shorebirds: an identification guide to the waders of the world* by Peter Hayman, John Marchant & Tony Prater (Christopher Helm) £19.95  
Our top choice this year: THE 'BRITISH BIRDS' BEST BIRD BOOK OF 1986. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 454-455)
- \* *The Partridge* by G. R. Potts (Collins) £19.95  
Authoritative monograph.
- \* *A Field Guide to the Birds of Japan* by Wild Bird Society of Japan & Shinji Takano (WBSJ) £19.95  
Useful anywhere in Asia. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 76: 472-473)
- \* *Birds in Scotland* by Valerie M. Thom (T. & A. D. Poyser) £24.00  
Detailed up-to-date avifauna. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 410-411)

- \* *A Guide to the Birds of Nepal* by Carol Inskipp & Tim Inskipp (Croom Helm) £25.00  
Status and distribution. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 102)
- \* *The Birds of Australia: a book of identification* by Ken Simpson & Nicholas Day (Christopher Helm) £25.00  
Well illustrated; succinct texts. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 220)
- \* *Crows of the World* by Derek Goodwin (British Museum, Nat. Hist.) £30.00  
New edition of the classic volume. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 71: 43)
- \* *Twentieth Century Wildlife Artists* by Nicholas Hammond (Christopher Helm) £30.00  
A personal selection.
- \* *The Encyclopaedia of Birds* edited by Christopher Perrins & A. L. A. Middleton (Allen & Unwin) £30.00  
A popular introduction to birds in the world. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 78: 609-610)
- \* *Wildfowl in Great Britain* by Myrlyn Owen, G. L. Atkinson-Willes & D. G. Salmon (Cambridge University Press) £35.00  
A new book rather than a mere revision.
- \* *A Dictionary of Birds* edited by Bruce Campbell & Elizabeth Lack (T. & A. D. Poyser) £39.00  
Our top choice last year: THE 'BRITISH BIRDS' BEST BIRD BOOK OF 1985. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 78: 467-468)
- \* *The Birds of Yorkshire* by John R. Mather (Christopher Helm) £40.00  
Mammoth county avifauna. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 510-511)
- \* *The Pheasants of the World* by Paul A. Johnsgard (OUP) £42.50  
Comprehensive and well illustrated. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 79: 510)
- \* *The Atlas of Australian Birds* by M. Blakers, S. J. J. F. Davies & P. N. Reilly (Melbourne UP) £45.00  
A superb book. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 77: 640-641)
- \* *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan. Compact Edition* by Sálim Ali & S. Dillon Ripley (OUP) £50.00  
Ten-volume handbook combined into one. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 78: 67)
- \* *The Birds of Africa* vol. 1 by Leslie H. Brown, Emil K. Urban & Kenneth B. Newman, illustrated by Martin Woodcock & Peter Hayman; vol. 2 by Emil K. Urban, C. Hilary Fry & Stuart Keith, illustrated by Martin Woodcock & Ian Willis (Academic Press) vol. 1 £59.50, vol. 2 £65.00  
A 'must' for those interested in African birds.
- \* *The Audubon Society Encyclopaedia of North American Birds* edited by John K. Terres (Audubon Society) £60.00  
With superb photographs. (Review: *Brit. Birds* 74: 410)
- \* *The Birds of the Western Palearctic* edited by Stanley Cramp and others (OUP) vols. 1-4 £65.00 per volume  
Essential for every serious birdwatcher. (Latest reviews: *Brit. Birds* 73: 602; 76: 324-325; 78: 468-470)



# Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 1985

*Michael J. Rogers and the Rarities Committee  
with comments by A. R. Dean and S. J. M. Gantlett*

**T**his is our twenty-eighth annual report. ZEISS West Germany has again sponsored the work of the Rarities Committee. This continued financial support is most welcome, enabling the Committee to cope much more effectively with the processing and publication of records and to include an attractive selection of photographs and drawings in this report.

The Committee has dealt with 894 records for 1985, 85% of which were accepted. A further 337 records for 1985 and earlier years are still being considered. Pre-1985 records which are still being dealt with are summarised below.

Details of Committee membership and points of interest arising from its annual meeting in March this year were covered earlier in 'Rarities Committee news and announcements' (*Brit. Birds* 79: 450-451). Full details of the Committee's constitution and the procedures followed when considering records are given in a fact sheet, a copy of which can be obtained from the Secretary, Michael J. Rogers, whose address is at the end of this report. Also available from the Secretary is a list of the species considered by the Committee, and copies of the Rarities Committee Record Form, which should be used (or its format followed) when submitting reports. Please enclose a SAE when requesting any of these items. All reports of any species on the Committee's list should be submitted to the Secretary, preferably via the appropriate county or regional recorder.

## **Acknowledgments**

We wish to thank observers, regional and county recorders, and the bird observatories for their continued ready co-operation on which the work of the Committee is totally dependent, and without which this report would not be so complete and accurate. We are again grateful to the Irish Rare Birds Committee and the Northern Ireland Bird Records Committee for permission to include their accepted records, and to their respective secretaries, Patrick Smiddy and Mrs P. M. Vizard, for supplying details. This co-operation enables the publication in one place of a complete review and running totals of all rarity records for the geographical unit of Britain and Ireland. Trevor Copp has again liaised over Channel Islands rarity records, and we are most grateful for his help: accepted records are included in the species comments, but not in the running totals.

The Committee is indebted to many individuals and organisations for special assistance during the year. A. R. Dean (passerines) and S. J. M. Gantlett (non-passerines) have shared the compilation of running species-totals and the writing of species comments this year; we are especially grateful to SJMG for taking on this task at short notice. P. G. Lansdown has monitored and periodically reported on the progress through the assessment process of records for which decisions are long-awaited. The BTO, the NCC, the RSPB and the British Museum (Natural History), Tring, have liaised over various matters. The following have been consulted for advice or other assistance over particular records: C. D. R. Heard, Dr J. T. R. Sharrock, Lars Svensson and Claudia Wilds.

Our report is again enhanced by photographs and sketches of rarities, and we thank the photographers and observers concerned. The inclusion of sketches and, particularly, photographs with submitted records is much appreciated, especially those when the only 'description' is of biometrics of birds in the hand.

PJG

### Pre-1985 records still under consideration

Pre-1985 records with which the Committee is currently involved include several Little Shearwaters *Puffinus assimilis*, four Madeiran Petrels *Oceanodroma castro*, two Long-toed Stints *Calidris subminuta*, several South Polar Skuas *Stercorarius maccormicki*, three Lesser Crested Terns *Sterna bengalensis*, Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegyptius* at Portland (Dorset) in 1984, two American Rock Pipits *Anthus spinoletta rubescens*, three Northern Mockingbirds *Mimus polyglottos*, two Short-toed Treecreepers *Certhia brachydactyla*, numerous Arctic Redpolls *Carduelis hornemanni*, two Pine Buntings *Emberiza leucocephalos*, and two Yellow-headed Blackbirds *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*.

The Committee is also engaged upon reviews of both past and pending records of black-headed Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava feldegg*, Citrine Wagtails *M. citreola*, Olivaceous Warblers *Hippolais pallida*, Isabelline Shrikes *Lanius isabellinus* and Two-barred Crossbills *Loxia leucoptera*.

Pre-1985 records still being investigated by the BOU Records Committee include White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* at Bough Beech Reservoir (Kent) in 1979, Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* at Dunwich (Suffolk) and Old Hall Marshes (Essex) in 1981, Grey-rumped Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes* at Dyfi Estuary (Dyfed/Gwynedd) in 1981, Cliff Swallow *Hirundo pyrrhonota* on St Agnes and St Mary's (Scilly) in 1983, White-throated Robin *Irania gutturalis* on the Calf of Man (Man) in 1983, Varied Thrush *Zoothera naevia* at Nanquidno (Cornwall) in 1982, and Yellow-browed Bunting *Emberiza chrysophrys* at Holkham (Norfolk) in 1975.

PGL

### Systematic list of accepted records

The principles and procedures followed in considering records were explained in the 1958 report (*Brit. Birds* 53: 155-158). The systematic list is set out in the same way as in the 1984 report (78: 529-589). The following points show the basis on which the list has been compiled.



(i) The details included for each record are (1) county; (2) locality; (3) number of birds if more than one, and age and sex if known (in the case of spring and summer records, however, the age is normally given only where the bird concerned was not in adult plumage); (4) if trapped or found dead and where specimen is stored, if known; (5) date(s); and (6) observer(s) up to three in number, in alphabetical order. In accordance with our declared policy (see *Brit. Birds* 68: 1-4), the new county names have been used, and observers are asked to bear this in mind when submitting records.

(ii) In general, this report is confined to records which are regarded as certain, and 'probables' are not included. In the case of the very similar Long-billed *Limnodromus scolopaceus* and Short-billed Dowitchers *L. griseus*, however, we are continuing to publish indeterminable records, and this also applies to observations of pratincoles *Glareola* and of such difficult groups as albatrosses *Diomedea* and frigatebirds *Fregata*.

(iii) The sequence of species, English names and specific nomenclature follow *The 'British Birds' List of Birds of the Western Palearctic* (1984). Any sight records of subspecies (including those of birds trapped and released) are normally referred to as

'showing the characters' of the race concerned.

(iv) The three numbers in brackets after each species' name refer respectively to the total number of individuals recorded in Britain and Ireland (excluding those 'At sea') (1) to the end of 1957, (2) for the period since the formation of the Rarities Committee in 1958, but excluding (3) the current year. The decision as to whether one or more individuals was involved is often difficult and rather arbitrary, but the consensus of members is indicated by 'possibly the same' (counted as different in the totals), 'probably the same' (counted as the same in totals), or 'the same' when the evidence is certain or overwhelming. An identical approach is applied to records of the same species recurring at the same locality after a lapse of time, including those which occur annually at the same or nearby site. In considering claims of more than one individual at the same or adjacent localities, the Committee usually requires firm evidence before more than one is counted in the totals. A detailed breakdown of the figures for previous years is held by the Honorary Secretary.

(v) The world breeding range is given in brackets at the beginning of each species comment.

### White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* (18, 78, 3)

**Cornwall** Sennen Cove, juvenile, moribund, 19th February, died in care, Mousehole Bird Hospital, 1st March, now at British Museum (per S. M. Christophers, W. R. Hirst) (*Brit. Birds* 78: plate 98).

**Shetland** Whalsay, adult, first seen 26th November 1983 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 532), to 6th May; returned 15th November to 1986 (Dr B. Marshall *et al.*). Due south of Holm of Burravoe, adult, 8th May (M. Heubeck). Burravoe, possibly first-summer, 13th May (M. Heubeck). Colgrave Sound, adult, 15th October (P. M. Ellis).

**1983 Shetland** Sandvoe, North Roe, long dead, 27th February (M. Heubeck *et al.*).

(Arctic Russia eastwards to Arctic Canada) The Shetland records are typical, but the Cornish bird, whilst the second for Cornwall, is only the fourth south of Yorkshire. The year 1983 was already the best, and now has nine records.

### Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* (0, 9, 0)

**Western Isles** Loch na Liana Moire, South Uist, first seen 8th June 1983 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 532), 27th April (T. J. & Mrs C. Stowe, J. M. Tonkin), 22nd July (D. Odell).

(North America) Sadly, the long-staying South Uist individual seems not to have stayed into 1986, and, with the disappearance of the famous Steller's Eider *Polysticta stelleri* (which graced the island from 1972 to 1984), South Uist no longer holds a unique attraction for the visiting birder.

**Black-browed Albatross** *Diomedea melanophris* (2, 23, 0)

**Shetland** Hermaness, Unst, first seen 1972 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 532), 10th March until late September (per D. Coutts).

(Southern oceans) The fourteenth summer of residence for the Hermaness bird. If it's sitting there waiting for a mate to chance by, then it's a good job they're long-lived: the last new sighting was off Cornwall in October 1982.

**Capped Petrel** *Pterodroma hasitata* (1, 1, 0)

**1984 Humberside** Barmston, juvenile ♀, long dead, 16th December (I. Forsyth, R. Lyon, D. E. Murray, P. M. Scanlon).

(Haiti is only known breeding site; formerly widespread in West Indies, dispersing to adjacent seas) The only other Palearctic record is of one caught on a heath near Swaffham, Norfolk, in March or April 1850. The species is a candidate for upgrading from BOU Category 'B' (species not recorded within the last 50 years) to Category 'A' on the strength of this corpse; but for the earlier record, it would qualify only for Category 'D'. In view of its poor condition, there does seem a chance too that it was a ship-assisted corpse. A record about 300 nautical miles west of Scotland on 26th February 1980 (and published in *Dutch Birding* 5: 85-86) has been rejected by the Rarities Committee.

**Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis* (5, 59, 1)

**Dumfries & Galloway** Corsewell Point, Wigtownshire, 14th September (R. H. Hogg, P. McEwan, G. Mitchell).

(Atlantic south from Madeira and Caribbean, and southern oceans) Also, two accepted as 'small shearwaters' (i.e. not quite certain Little Shearwaters) in Ireland: off Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 23rd June and at Bridges of Ross, Co. Clare, on 31st August. A number of earlier reports of this difficult species remain under consideration. The dates of these records are typical, but this is only the second record for Scotland. The year 1984 was the best, with four records.

**Wilson's Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus* (4, 6, 1)

(Southern oceans) None in Britain, but Ireland had its fourth record in 1985: at sea about 88 km southwest of Mizen Head, Co. Cork, on 17th August (*Brit. Birds* 78: plates 293-295). The recent interest in pelagic trips into the southwestern approaches may yet produce more records of this elusive species.

**Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus* (15, 142, 0)

**1984 Yorkshire** South Potteric Carr, 11th June to 16th August; pair raised three young (A. M. Allport, S. Boyes, R. P. Lambe *et al.*).

(West Eurasia, Africa and Australia) This was the first proved breeding record for Britain, although it was strongly suspected in East Anglia in the nineteenth century, and also in southern England in 1947. Pairs have also summered in Surrey (1956), Somerset (1958), Huntingdon (1960) and possibly elsewhere. On average there were six records each year during 1971 to 1979, so it is perhaps surprising that breeding has occurred during



the 1980s which can muster only eight records in total to 1986. At least a female returned to Potteric Carr in 1985 (but full details have not yet been received); breeding did not occur again. The only completely blank years since 1959 were 1974 and 1982.

**Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* (165, 152, 3)

**Devon** Lopwell Dam, adult, 6th to 14th June (N. J. Cabbie *et al.*).

**Kent** Stodmarsh, adult, 16th May (P. & Mrs F. Hamilton, D. Shakleton); presumed same, Westbere, 18th (W. G. Harvey).

**Scilly** St Mary's, juvenile, 11th to 20th October (P. J. Grant *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 79: plates 32-33).

(South Eurasia, Africa and the Americas) Apart from the exceptional 22 records in 1983, the average number of occurrences each year since 1970 is five. Since 1975, only 1984 (with two) and 1985 have produced less than four records.

**Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides* (95, 23, 1)

**Cornwall** Bude, first-year, 10th April to 23rd May (L. G. R. Evans, J. C. Pett, G. P. Sutton *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 78: plate 368).

(Southern Europe, southwest Asia and Africa) This becomes the earliest record by two days: the previous earliest was at Slapton Ley, Devon, on 12th April 1981.

**Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* (2, 31, 1)

**Dorset** See Somerset below.

**Somerset** Sutton Bingham Reservoir and Lower Key area, adult, 22nd December to at least 26th January 1986 (M. A. Hallett *et al.*).

(Almost cosmopolitan in tropics; nearest regular breeding in south of France) It is perhaps surprising that during the 1980s 13 out of the 14 records have been in winter (7th November to 5th April), the only record during the classic spring over-shoot time being from Cley, Norfolk, on 28th May 1983. Of the 23 records before 1980, only three were outside the period 15th April to 29th October. It seems likely that these recent winter records are of birds wandering as the species gradually spreads to breed farther north in Europe.

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* (23, 323, 33)

**Cornwall** Marazion, two, 18th April (T. M. Carne, G. Cockhill, B. K. Mellow). Gannet Estuary, 21st to 26th April (S. M., Mrs A. D. & Miss H. M. Christophers).

**Devon** Charlton, Kingsbridge, at least 20th April (A. F. Doidge *et al.*). Otter Estuary, 21st April (M. Lockyer); presumed same, Powderham, 25th; Dawlish Warren, 26th (C. W. Stone *et al.*). Exe Estuary, juvenile, 20th to 30th August (M. D. & S. Elcoate *et al.*). See also 1984 Devon below.

**Essex** Hamford Water, 26th May (Dr S. Cox). Foulness Island, 7th July to 26th August, probably since 27th June (D. Bridges, A. R. Perkins, G. Wright *et al.*).

**Hampshire** Fareham Creek, 5th September (Dr G. P. Green). Hayling Island, 14th September (K. Noble, J. Reaney *et al.*).

**Kent** Dungeness, 18th April (P. W. Maton). Cliffe, two, 27th May (S. R. & Mrs J. R. Perry). Elmley and Capel Fleet, 15th June to 2nd July (R. I. Thorpe *et al.*).

**Man, Isle of** Langness, at least 5th July (T. W. Edwards, Mrs B. M. Faulconbridge).

**Norfolk** Hickling, 25th May (M. J. & Mrs S. F. Seago).

**Scilly** St Mary's, 29th June to 2nd July, also Bryher, 30th June (Mrs V. A. Ellis, W. H. Wagstaff *et al.*).

**Suffolk** Minsmere, two, 28th May (M. Ball, B. Cooper); presumed one of same, Havergate, 29th (G. N. Megson), Felixstowe, 1st June (M. A. & Mrs S. G. Hall); Minsmere, 19th, 24th, 25th June (T. D. Charlton, J. H. Grant *et al.*); possibly same, Orfordness, 30th (C. P. S. Ruffles *et al.*), Shingle Street, 18th July (R. Waters *et al.*); same, Havergate Island, 18th July to at least 26th August (K. Bennett, M. Langman, G. N. Megson *et al.*).

**Surrey** Staines Reservoirs, three, 27th May (F. J. Chandler, C. Watson, R. Wells). Queen Mary Reservoir, 3rd to 6th July (D. C. Bailey, A. J. Beasley, G. R. Green *et al.*).

**Sussex, East** Rye, 18th April (Mrs J. Plumpton per Dr B. J. Yates).

**Warwickshire** Coton Gravel-pit, Kingsbury, 20th to 21st May (S. M. Haynes).

**Wight, Isle of** St Catherine's Point, 19th April (P. J. Barden, P. Gandy, D. B. Wooldridge *et al.*).

**Yorkshire, West** Fairburn Ings, 23rd May (P. Brill, B. Copley, G. R. Welch *et al.*).

**1984 Cornwall** Tresillian, 23rd April (T. M. Carne, B. K. Mellow). See also 1984 Devon below.

**1984 Devon** Heanton Court, Taw Estuary, 11th September (M. Blackmore). Lopwell Reservoir, 15th to 17th August (*Brit. Birds* 78: 533), finders included Mrs J. Harrop. Same individual, Landulph Marsh (*Brit. Birds* 78: 533), locality is in Cornwall. Yealm Estuary, November (*Brit. Birds* 78: 533), present to at least 31st March 1985.

**1984 Dyfed** Taf Estuary, Carmarthenshire, 23rd April (L. & Mrs H. Sealy Lewis). Teifi Estuary area, Cardiganshire, about 24th April to 19th May (M. E. Baines, A. East *et al.*).

**1984 Hampshire** Farlington Marshes, 22nd June (*Brit. Birds* 78: 533), first, Titchfield Haven, 15th (per E. J. Wiseman).

**1984 Yorkshire, North** High Butts Nature Reserve, Ripon Parks, 4th May (T. Scott, C. Slator, S. Worwood).

(South Eurasia, Africa and Australia) Four in Ireland: at Lough Eyes, Co. Fermanagh, on 24th June; at Swords Estuary, Co. Dublin, 1st to 19th May; at Portmagee, Co. Kerry, 6th to 7th May; and at Fethard-on-Sea, Co. Wexford, from 10th to about 17th April. Also, one on Alderney, Channel Islands, on 29th August. Channel Islands records, however, are not included in the species totals. The increase continues: 1985 was bettered only by the quite exceptional influx of 47 in 1970. As the northward range extension continues in France, with the first breeding in Morbihan and Finistere in 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 77: 586), it may not be premature to predict that the first breeding in Britain is not too far away.

### **Great White Egret** *Egretta alba* (10, 18, 5)

**Highland** Gills Bay, Caithness, 18th to 19th June (Mrs P. M. Collett, Mr Sowards *et al.*), probably same as second Shetland individual.

**Norfolk** Horsey, 12th and 15th July (B. Bland *et al.*).

**Shetland** Burrafirth, Unst, 6th to 7th June (D. Gilbert, M. Sinclair, I. Spence *et al.*); differing individual, North Nesting area, 25th to 26th (D. Coutts, I. Sandison *et al.*), probably same as Highland individual.

**Suffolk** Minsmere, 6th to 20th October (F. K. Cobb, G. J. Jobson, A. Lakinski *et al.*); same, Walberswick, 20th (R. Fairhead).

**Sussex, West** Thorney Deep, 15th June (C. B. & Mrs M. R. Collins).

(Almost cosmopolitan, extremely local in Europe) There was none at all from 1951 to 1974, but since then records have been annual, except in 1975 and 1976. Five in a year is a new peak, reflecting the increases recorded in the Netherlands (where the first breeding record was in 1978) and France (*Brit. Birds* 72: 275, and 79: 285). There is some evidence that the Titchwell individual of 2nd October 1983 (*Brit. Birds* 77: 511) was in Norfolk from mid September to at least 6th October, with brief but not conclusive sightings at King's Lynn and Wells respectively.



**Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* (26, 25, 4)

**Devon** Thurlestone, 27th April (Mrs J. Huggins); same, Erme Estuary, 28th to 1st May (M. R. A. & R. E. Bailey *et al.*).

**Humberside** Spurn, 10th May (P. I. Holt).

**Scilly** St Agnes, 28th to 29th August (R. C. Righelato *et al.*).

**Staffordshire** Coombes Valley, 2nd June (P. Brown, K. Moore).

**1984 Lincolnshire** Frieston, 25th April (J. W. Fox, R. A. Spiers).

(Iberia, and Eurasia from France to China, also southern Africa) The increase continues, with these typical records: the four in 1985 have been exceeded only once, by seven in 1977. There is also a record, concerning an adult and an immature together in Cumbria, still under consideration.

**Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* (many, 25, 0)

**Kent** Stodmarsh and Stour Valley area, two, since 1975 and 1979 respectively (*Brit. Birds* 78: 535), to 3rd February, one to 9th April; at least one, 25th October to end of year; one of same, Sheppey, 6th May to 17th August (per D. W. Taylor).

**1984 Kent** Stodmarsh, two, at latest 1st November to end of year (*Brit. Birds* 78: 535), present 13th October (C. M. Poole).

(Almost cosmopolitan, nearest breeding colonies in Balkans) There have been no new arrivals since the one in Norfolk in October 1982.

**Bewick's Swan** *Cygnus columbianus* (0, 3, 3)

(North America) Ireland maintains its monopoly of records of birds showing characters of the North American race *C. c. columbianus* (formerly known as 'Whistling Swan', but now lumped with Bewick's Swan *C. c. bewickii*, the species being renamed by the Americans as 'Tundra Swan'). There were three records in 1985: an adult at Ballycotton, Co. Cork, from 15th January to 27th February; and an adult at South Slob, Co. Wexford, from 3rd to late March, and again from 31st December into 1986. It seems possible that these three records all refer to the same individual, and, further, that all six Irish records (the first in December 1978) may relate to just two or three returning birds.

**Lesser White-fronted Goose** *Anser erythropus* (47, 68, 1)

**Merseyside** Southport, first-winter, 19th January (M. S. Garner, W. S. Morton, A. M. Stoddart *et al.*) (figs. 1 & 2).

**1984 Norfolk** Yare Valley, adult, 26th January (M. Otsu).

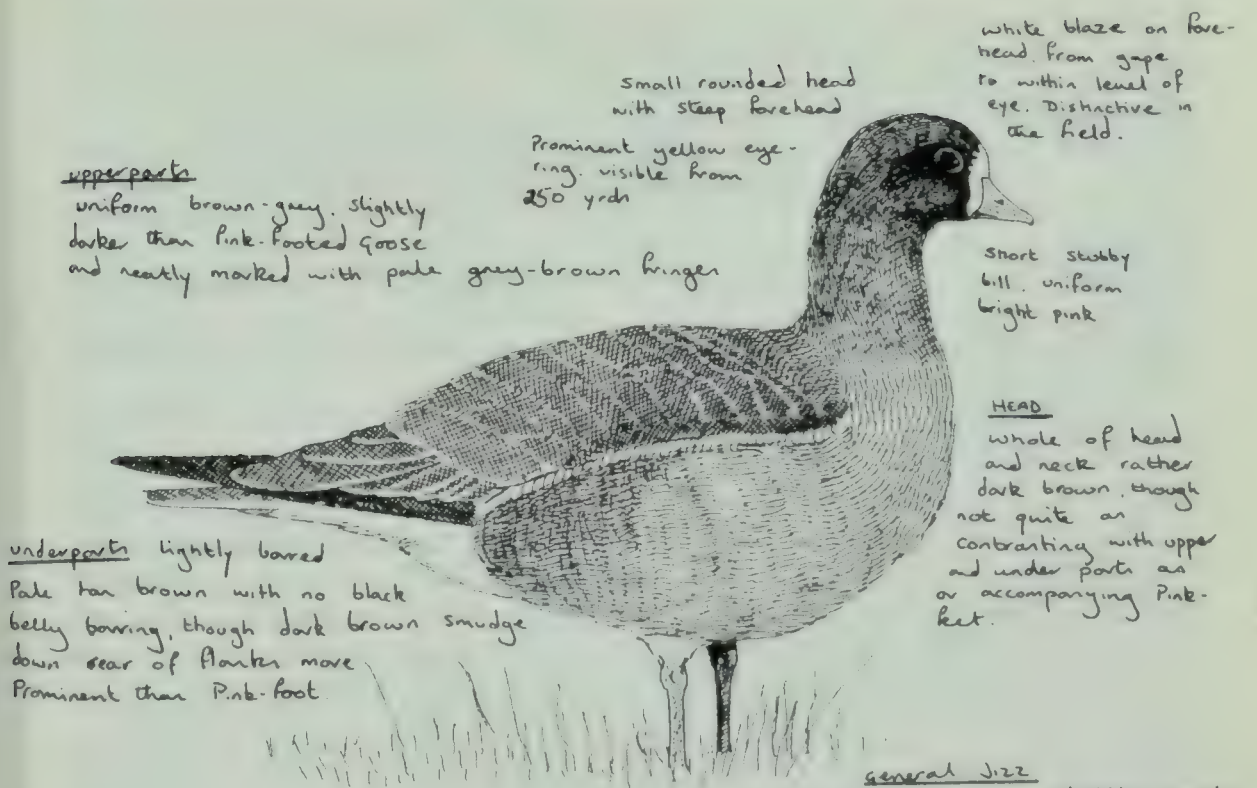
(Northeast Europe and Siberia) Records at Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, were annual from 1966 to 1983, but there has been none there for the last two winters. The Yare Valley record is the first to be reported since 1971 at this once almost regular locality. Various escapes seen included an adult in the Abberton area, Essex, from January to April.

**Brent Goose** *Branta bernicla* (1, 28, 7)

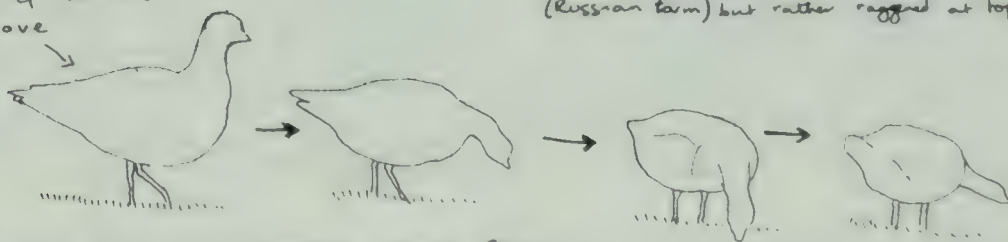
Individuals showing characters of the North American and east Siberian race *B. b. nigricans*, colloquially known as 'Black Brant', were recorded as follows:

**Essex** St Osyth, adult, freshly dead, 28th February (R. W. Arthur, Dr S. Cox). Kirby-le-Soken and Hamford Water, adult, 8th December to at least 5th January 1986 (Dr S. & Mrs P. A. Cox *et al.*).

**Kent** Shellness, see 1984 Kent below.



L.W.F.G. on the move



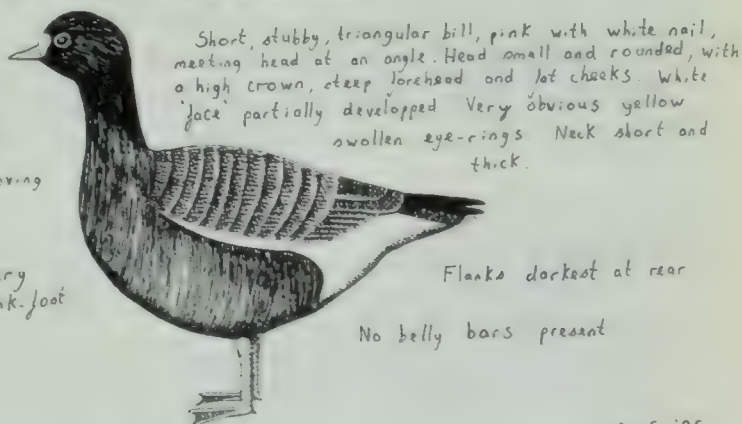
While Pink-footed Geese, usually spent some time feeding in one general area the L.W.F. Goose moved continually through the flock, sometimes quite rapidly while feeding with a mowing side to side motion.

W.S. MORTON

Figs. 1 & 2. First-winter Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*, Merseyside, January 1985 (above, W. S. Morton; below, A. M. Stoddart)

A very small 'grey' goose, slightly smaller than a Pink-foot and very compactly-proportioned with generally dark plumage, darkest on the head and neck. Lacked the pale mantle of a Pink-foot. Fed actively whilst walking fast, continually moving through the flock.

in flight, looked small and dainty and very dark, lacking the pale forewing of the Pink-foot



A.M.S. '85



**Norfolk** Cley area, adults, first seen 6th and 17th November 1984 respectively (*Brit. Birds* 78: 536), at least one to 10th March (per G. E. Dunmore). Possibly one of same, Burnham Deepdale, 5th May (G. Allport, M. O'Brien).

**1982 Suffolk** Boyton Marshes, adult, 3rd January (M. C. Marsh, S. Piotrowski).

**1983 Essex** Leigh on Sea, 6th November (*Brit. Birds* 77: 513), last seen 11th March (C. Todd, G. Wright) and possibly same as one or other of Kirby-le-Soken individuals (*Brit. Birds* 78: 536).

**1984 Essex** See 1983 Essex above.

**1984 Kent** Sheppey, adult, 15th November to at least January 1985, two, 8th December to 1985 (A. T. M. Ruck, R. I. Thorpe *et al.*).

**1984 Surrey** Staines Reservoirs, immature, 27th October to 18th November (*Brit. Birds* 78: 536), to 23rd (per P. Naylor).

(Arctic North America and East Siberia) In Ireland: at Strangford Lough, Co. Down, on 22nd September, and a different individual there from 3rd to 9th November; adult at Rogerstown, Co. Dublin, on 9th January; two at Carlingford Lough, Co. Louth, from 1st to 6th January, one remaining to 12th January, and one considered to be that present in November 1984. There are also a number of late records from Ireland: two adults at Strangford Lough, Co. Down, from 10th to 18th November with one to 30th December 1978; adult at Strangford Lough, Co. Down, on 20th October and two there on 17th November 1979; Lough Foyle, Co. Londonderry, from 16th to 19th October 1980; two at Strangford Lough, Co. Down, from 25th October to 2nd November 1980; two at Strangford Lough, Co. Down, from late October to early November 1981; and two at Malahide, Co. Dublin, from 11th to 14th December 1984. Two late records come from Le Hocq, Jersey, Channel Islands: 9th December 1982, and 4th to 12th December 1984. Records from the Channel Islands are not included in the species totals. Seven presumed new individuals is bettered only by the nine in 1984. The increase is likely to be directly related to observer awareness: there were only four records before 1981.

### **Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis* (15, 14, 6)

**Essex** Shoeburyness area, 3rd February (M. F. Drake).

**Kent** Shellness, adult, 7th January to 11th February (M. Edhem, R. V. White *et al.*). Chetney, adult, 19th January to at least 23rd March (T. E. Bowley, M. C. Buckland, P. Worsley *et al.*). St Mary's Marshes, adult, 25th November to early 1986 (R. I. Thorpe *et al.*).

**Lincolnshire** Leverton Marsh, 13th to 14th February (A. & D. Ball, S. Keightley); 17th (K. & R. Heath). Wrangle Flats, two, probably first-winter individuals, 23rd February (P. Beaumont, D. Hursthouse).

(West Siberia) The increase continues, in line with the increasing number of records in Europe (*Brit. Birds* 73: 574; 75: 569; and 78: 639), but six within the space of two months is unprecedented; the previous peak was three in winter 1983/84. Winter flocks of Brent Geese *B. bernicla* are clearly worth checking carefully for this handsome Russian visitor.

### **American Wigeon** *Anas americana* (22, 117, 11)

**Berkshire** Thatcham, two first-winter ♂♂, two ♀♀, 28th November to at least 28th January 1986 (A. J. Croucher, Dr R. L. Flood, K. V. Pritchard *et al.*), also Theale area, 6th December onwards (C. D. R. Heard *et al.*).

**Cleveland** Dorman's pool, ♂, 2nd June (T. Francis *et al.*).

**Glamorgan, Mid** Kenfig Pool, first-winter or ♀, 29th October to 9th November (N. Odin *et al.*).

**Northamptonshire** Ringstead Gravel-pits, ♂, since 1st November 1984 to 1st January (J. I. Blincow *et al.*); presumed same, Ditchford Gravel-pits, 20th November (S. P. Fisher). See 1984 Northamptonshire below.

**Scilly** St Agnes, latterly also St Mary's and Annet, first-winter, 28th September to 24th October (R. J. Burness, N. E. Gammon, Mrs P. Walton *et al.*).

**Strathclyde** Endrick Mouth, ♂, 19th May (G. J. Brock *et al.*).

**Warwickshire** Kingsbury Water Park, ♂, 15th June (J. E. Fortey, P. Spencer *et al.*); same, Hams Hall, 16th to 18th (B. L. Kington), Lea Marston, 22nd (A. Curran).

**1978 Grampian** Near St Fergus, ♀, 4th April, previously accepted (*Brit. Birds* 72: 513), but now considered unacceptable after review.

**1981 Cornwall** Skewjack, four, including at least two ♂♂, 26th September (E. Griffiths, H. P. K. Robinson *et al.*). Hayle Estuary, at least five: probably four ♂♂, 26th to 27th September (L. P. Williams *et al.*), presumed same as Skewjack individuals; at least one ♀, 27th (K. E. Vinicombe *et al.*); subsequently up to four ♂♂ and ♀ to at least 24th October, probably to 17th February 1982 (L. P. Williams *et al.*).

**1982 Cornwall** See 1981 Cornwall above.

**1983 Northamptonshire** See 1984 Northamptonshire below.

**1984 Northamptonshire** Ditchford, Ringstead and Thrapston Gravel-pits, ♂, since 22nd October 1983 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 536), also Pitsford Reservoir, 28th January (D. J. Burges *et al.*); presumed same, Ringstead Gravel-pits, 1st November to 1st January 1985 (J. I. Blincow *et al.*) and Ditchford Gravel-pits, 28th November (S. P. Fisher).

(North America) Also, two in Ireland: a first-winter male at Ballycotton, Co. Cork, from 8th April to 22nd November; and a male at Tralee Bay, Co. Kerry, on 23rd November. Records have been annual since 1965, apart from 1970. The multiple arrivals in Berkshire and in Cornwall in 1981 (although the former may, perhaps, have been escapes) recall the flock of 13 at Akeragh Lough, Co. Kerry, in October 1968. Though it has been said that larger numbers were seen at Hayle in 1981, the Committee has, to date, received no acceptable substantiation of more than five. In addition, the 1980 individual on Tresco, Scilly, on which further full reports are still sought, remains under consideration.

## **Teal** *Anas crecca* (13, 206, 16)

Drakes showing the characters of the North American race *A. c. carolinensis*, colloquially known as 'Green-winged Teal', were recorded as follows:

**Cleveland** Long Drag Pools, 31st March (A. J. & G. C. Tompsett).

**Cornwall** Sithian's Reservoir, 26th December (S. C. Hutchings).

**Dorset** Wool and Hole's Bay, 28th to 29th January and 14th February (M. Cade, D. R. Collins).

**Greater London** Walthamstow Reservoirs, 28th February to at least 17th March (P. Fletcher *et al.*).

**Hampshire** Fleet, 24th to 30th March (J. M. Clark, A. James, D. Unsworth *et al.*).

**Lincolnshire** Gibraltar Point, 28th March (R. Lambert, P. & R. Palmer *et al.*), presumed same as 1984 individual (*Brit. Birds* 78: 537).

**Northumberland** Holywell Pond, occasionally, 24th February to 20th April (C. Bradshaw, C. Hudson *et al.*); presumed same as Tyne & Wear individual below.

**Orkney** Loch of Isbister, 8th January (E. R. Meek).

**Scilly** St Mary's, first-winter, 23rd October to at least 21st November (C. D. R. Heard, Dr M. A. Woodhead *et al.*).

**Suffolk** Minsmere, 7th July (T. D. Charlton *et al.*).

**Tayside** Near Williamston, Madderty, 12th to 18th April (E. J. Maguire *et al.*).

**Tyne & Wear** Jarrow Slake, 21st February (D. Fullerton, T. I. Mills); same, Backworth, 22nd March (J. D. Holding), presumed same as Northumberland individual above.

**Western Isles** Near Loch Portain, North Uist, 2nd to 12th April (S. J. & Mrs J. A. Riley *et al.*).

**Yorkshire, North** Fairburn Ings, 16th February (G. R. & Mrs H. J. Welch).



**1984 Devon** Powderham Park, 22nd October to about 1st November (R. H. Montgomery *et al.*).

**1984 Yorkshire, North** Long Preston, 4th to 9th March (B. Shorrocks); presumed returning individual of 8th March 1983 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 537).

(North America) Four in Ireland: male at Ballymacoda, Co. Cork, on 9th November; male at Marino Point, Cork Harbour, Co. Cork, from 23rd November into 1986; male at Bull Island, Co. Dublin, from 19th November into 1986; and male at Blackwater Callows, Lismore, Co. Waterford, on 17th November. A late 1984 record involved a male at Rahasane, Co. Galway, on 10th November. Some fairly typical records. A slight peak in early spring is noticeable.

**American Black Duck** *Anas rubripes* (1, 12, 1)

**Gwynedd** Aber, ♂, first seen 1979 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 537), to at least 29th January (R. Q. Skeen per T. Gravett).

**Lothian** Tynninghame, ♀, 9th February to 23rd May, 20th July, 31st August; paired with Mallard *A. platyrhynchos*; again present, spring 1986 (A. Brown, A. J. Clunas, P. R. Gordon *et al.*).

(North America) Long-staying individuals almost seem to be the rule rather than the exception: as well as the above records, a female remained in Scilly from 1976 to 1983, and a male remained at North Kessock, Inverness, from October 1981 to August 1982.

**Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* (19, 102, 2)

**Northamptonshire** Thrapston Gravel-pits, sex uncertain, 25th August to at least 13th September (D. J. Burges, N. McMahon *et al.*).

**1982 Dumfries & Galloway** Logan, Stranraer, juvenile ♂, shot, 29th September (Sir N. Buchan-Hepburn, J. J. Dick); mounted specimen privately retained.

**1984 Hertfordshire** Stocker's Lake, ♀, 20th to at least 27th April (*Brit. Birds* 78: 537), again 28th (R. I. Allison).

(North America) Also one in Ireland: a female at Clonakilty, Co. Cork, on 23rd September. Records have been annual since 1966. The last ten years have averaged seven per annum, and this is the worst year since 1977.

**Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* (1, 173, 21)

**Avon** Chew Valley Lake, ♂, 18th May to at least 30th June (A. F. A. Hawkins, R. J. Higgins, A. J. Merritt *et al.*).

**Cheshire** Frodsham, ♂, 22nd to at least 24th August (M. S. Garner *et al.*).



**Cornwall** Stithians Reservoir, ♀, 12th to 24th October (S. M. Christophers, J. Dustow *et al.*). Drift Reservoir and neighbouring localities, ♀, 10th November to at least 2nd March 1986 (C. C. Barnard, M. P. Semmens *et al.*); ♂, 17th November to at least 2nd March 1986 (C. C. Barnard, M. P. Semmens *et al.*).

**Devon** Melbury Reservoir, ♀, 23rd February (D. & S. Churchill *et al.*).

**Dorset** Radipole, first-winter ♂, 18th November to at least 25th December (M. Cade, J. Elliot *et al.*).

**Dumfries & Galloway** Milton Loch, ♂, 18th to at least 26th April (D. M. Hawker *et al.*).

**Gloucestershire** Flaxley Pool, ♂, since 28th December 1984 to 1st January (*Brit. Birds* 78: 538). Witcombe Reservoir, ♂, 16th to 17th May (J. D. Sanders).

**Hampshire** See Surrey.

**Highland** Insh Marshes, ♂, 11th October 1984 to at least January (*Brit. Birds* 78: 538), also Inverness Firth, 5th February (L. G. R. Evans), 10th to 11th (S. J. Aspinall *et al.*).

**Humberside** Tophill Low Reservoir, ♂, 9th January to 15th April (P. M. Scanlan *et al.*), presumed returning individual last reported 30th October 1983 to 20th April 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 538).

**Lancashire** Stocks Reservoir, ♂, 17th to at least 26th February (B. Lee, A. C. Robinson *et al.*).

**Northumberland** Holywell Pond, ♂, 4th to 26th May, 27th to 28th June, 6th to 24th July, 20th August (R. Johnson, P. R. Jones *et al.*); presumed same, Low Hauxley, 25th May (I. Fisher, I. Kerton, K. Reid *et al.*), Arcot Pond, 12 dates, 17th August to 24th October (M. J. Sharpe *et al.*). See also Tyne & Wear.

**Scilly** Tresco, juvenile to first-winter ♂, 14th October to at least 17th November (D. N. Bakewell *et al.*).

**Shetland** Loch of Norby, ♂, at least 7th July (C. Holt *et al.*).

**Strathclyde** Martnaham and Kerse Lochs, Ayrshire, ♂, 9th to 10th March (R. H. Hogg, Dr I. H. Leach, W. McKechnie).

**Surrey** Frimley Gravel-pits, first-winter ♂, discontinuously 17th November to 15th December (K. B. Wills *et al.*); also Badshot Lea Pond, 15th and 21st to 22nd December, Ash Vale Gravel-pits, 23rd to 31st December, Fleet Pond, Hampshire, 20th to 23rd November (J. M. Clark *et al.*); still at Surrey localities to at least 16th February 1986.

**Tyne & Wear** Seaton Burn, ♂, 1st October (I. Morley per M. S. Hodgson), presumed same as Northumberland individual.

**1980 Devon** Slapton Ley, two ♀♀, 9th March (*Brit. Birds* 74: 462), also 30th (S. M. Henson, J. A. Hopper, P. R. Wilcox).

**1982 Dyfed** River Tywi, near Bethlehem, ♂, at least 25th January (*Brit. Birds* 77: 516), same as Dryslwyn individual, 20th to 27th December 1981 (*Brit. Birds* 75: 492) (D. V. H. Roberts).

**1984 Gloucestershire** Flaxley Pool, ♂, 28th December to 1st January 1985 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 538), finders were T. Baker, J. Wyllie.

**1984 Suffolk** Benacre, ♂, 25th to 26th October (*Brit. Birds* 78: 538), finder was C. S. Waller.

**1984 Yorkshire, South** Potteric Carr, ♂, 14th April (S. Boyes, R. P. Lambe, R. J. Scott *et al.*).

**269.** Male Ring-necked Duck *Arthya collaris*, Co. Dublin, March 1985 (Brian Madden)





(North America) Six in Ireland: male at Carrigadroghid, Co. Cork, on 2nd March; male at Swords, Co. Dublin, from 2nd February to 7th March (plate 269); male at Lough Gur, Co. Limerick, on 28th March; female at Dawn River Reservoir, Co. Waterford, on 15th March; female at South Slob, Co. Wexford, from 28th February to 11th March, and a different female there from 24th March to 8th April. A late 1984 record involved a male at Dunfanaghy, Co. Donegal, from 1st to 16th December. The best year since the peaks of 1979 and 1980, which produced 29 and 35 new records respectively. It is always difficult to be sure of exact numbers, however, because of wandering and returning individuals.

**King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis* (62, 111, 4)

**Highland** Embo, ♂, 3rd January to 16th February (G. N. Megson, R. Proctor *et al.* and per A. R. Mainwood). Loch Fleet, ♂♂, 3rd March to 10th May, two, 7th April to 10th May (P. Aley, J. F. Babbington, S. J. Cox *et al.*); ♂, 7th to 29th August (per A. R. Mainwood). Golspie, ♂, 1st June (M. D. & Mrs L. Sutton, P. A. Wain), presumed one of above individuals.

**Shetland** Lerwick, ♀, 13th to 28th April (D. Coutts *et al.*). Fair Isle, ♂, 22nd and 25th May (C. D. R. Heard, K. B. Shepherd).

**1983 Shetland** Yell Sound, ♀, 10th November (P. J. Ewins, R. J. Tulloch, R. M. Wynde).

**1984 Shetland** Due NW of Lunna Ness, ♀, 17th April (P. M. Ellis, R. M. Wynde *et al.*).

(Circumpolar Arctic) Also two together in Ireland: first-winter male and female near Belmullet, Co. Mayo, from 17th to 18th March. Two males have been recorded, on and off, at Golspie/Loch Fleet/Embo since 1975. Males have been seen annually since 1966, but females have been found annually only since 1982 (although they were also recorded in 1969, 1971 and 1973-75). It may be noted here that the Steller's Eider *Polysticta stelleri* recorded on South Uist, Western Isles, from 1972 to 1984 seems to have finally disappeared and was not seen in 1985.

**Surf Scoter** *Melanitta perspicillata* (75, 168, 24)

**Clwyd** Abergele, ♂, 31st December to 1st January 1986 (R. Bagguley, R. D. Corran *et al.*).

**Dorset** Portland, ♂, 9th April (B. E. Slade *et al.*).

**Fife** St Andrews, ♂, 4th January (P. J. Heath, S. L. Rivers *et al.*), 8th and 20th (R. Cleghorn, J. Grant); also in Lothian.

**Grampian** Spey Bay, ♂ and ♀, 2nd February (S. J. Dougill, R. J. Safford, J. Young).

**Highland** Glenelg, Wester Ross, ♂, 10th June (Mrs I. Chase, Dr J. E. Murray).

**Lothian** Gosford Bay, ♂, 21st to 22nd March, 12 to 17th April (A. Brown, T. Smith *et al.*); also in Fife.

**Northumberland** Twixt Hauxley and Coquet Island, first-summer ♂, 30th May (B. Ellis).

**1984 Dyfed** Burry Port, immature, 6th to 7th October (*Brit. Birds* 78: 539), to at least 21st (R. I. Allison, N. Odin).

**1984 Fife** St Andrews, ♂, to 1st April (*Brit. Birds* 78: 539), also 4th (P. M. Potts *et al.*).

**1984 Grampian** Balmedie, ♂, mid August (J. F. Riddoch).

**1984 Gwynedd** Llanfairfechan, ♂, since December 1983 to 6th April (*Brit. Birds* 78: 539), again 11th (W. S. Morton).

(North America) There were nine records in Ireland: male at Dundrum Bay, Co. Down, on 2nd November; adult male at Lahinch, Co. Clare, on 23rd March; female/immature at Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 9th October; immature male at Murvagh, Co. Donegal, on 5th January; adult male at Rossknowlagh, Co. Donegal, on 5th January; two adult males at Murvagh, Co. Donegal, on 26th December, one to 27th December; six in Ballinskelligs Bay, Co. Kerry, on 3rd January, and a male there on 11th

October; and three adult males at Curracloe/Ballinesker, Co. Wexford, on 6th to 7th April. A late record from 1983 involved five adult males at Ballinesker, Co. Wexford, on 14th April. Only 1977, 1982, 1983 and 1984 have also produced double figures of presumed new individuals, with 20, 12, 28 and 36 respectively; but it is always difficult to know which are new and which are returning or wandering birds.

### **Black Kite** *Milvus migrans* (5, 67, 7)

**Derbyshire** See Greater Manchester below.

**Durham** Near Stanhope, 21st April (R. H. Holmes, C. Jewitt).

**Gloucestershire** Symond's Yat, 15th May (I. D. Bullock, A. M. Stoddart, J. Wyllie); also seen Hereford & Worcester side of county boundary.

**Greater Manchester** Mellor, near Stockport, 5th June (A. Broome *et al.*); also seen Derbyshire side of county boundary.

**Hereford & Worcester** See Gloucestershire above.

**Humberside** Spurn, 19th April (M. C. Dennis, S. Elliott, B. R. Spence *et al.*).

**Kent** Sheppey, 24th to 26th May (R. & Mrs A. Gomes, P. J. Oliver, J. Young *et al.*).

**Norfolk** Snettisham, 24th June (T. Callaway). Langham, Wells and North Creak area, 12th July (S. J. M. Gantlett, J. Hall, R. G. Millington *et al.*).

**1978 Nottinghamshire** Osberton, Worksop, dead, about 27th May, apparently poisoned; mounted specimen retained by W. Fox, Osberton Estate (per D. Hursthouse).

(Most of Eurasia, Africa and Australia) Another good year, but, as is usual, none of the birds settled in one area for very long. Only four of the 40 recorded since 1980 have been seen on more than one date.

### **White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* (many, 11, 3)

**Cleveland** Boulby Cliffs, immature, 27th October (I. Boustead, P. Forster, N. Jackson), later seen in North Yorkshire.

**Humberside** Spurn, adult, 31st May (M. Clegg). Flamborough Head, immature, 27th October (B. Armitage, J. E., J. M. & Mrs S. M. Dale, G. B. Silver *et al.*), later seen in Lincolnshire.

**Lincolnshire** Saltfleetby, immature, 27th October (M. Mellor, J. Walton); same, Gibraltar Point, 27th (J. Torino *et al.*).

**Suffolk** Benacre, first- to second- or second- to third-calendar-year, 12th November (J. C. Eaton), 28th November to at least 18th December (M. Bunn, J. H. Grant *et al.*); same, Walberswick, 13th November; Dunwich, 28th (per P. W. Murphy).

**Yorkshire, North** Scarborough, immature, 27th October (R. H. Appleby, S. A. Stirrup *et al.*), later seen in Humberside.

**1982 Suffolk** Martlesham Creek, 21st to 30th January (*Brit. Birds* 76: 489), also 1st February (M. Crewe).

**1983 Buckinghamshire** Kingsley and Brill area, third- to fourth-calendar-year, 22nd November to 18th February 1984 (the late R. A. Cawthorne, J. H. Marchant, D. A. Seddon *et al.*) (plates 270 & 271); also seen in Tiddington, Oxfordshire area.

**1983 Oxfordshire** See 1983 Buckinghamshire above.

**1984 Buckinghamshire** See 1983 Buckinghamshire above.

**1984 Oxfordshire** See 1983 Buckinghamshire above.

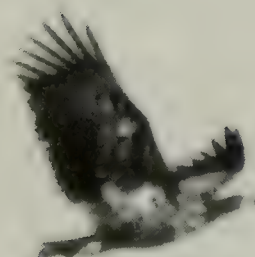
(Southwest Greenland, Iceland and Eurasia) At present, there is insufficient evidence to link the southward-travelling individual of 27th October 1985 with either the Suffolk individual mentioned here or that at Titchwell, Norfolk, during 16th to 19th November, on which full identification details are still required. The one at Spurn seems to be the first adult recorded (apart from the re-introduction scheme on Rhum) since



at least 1958. The East Coast immatures are surely all genuine winter visitors from the increasing European population (*Brit. Birds* 78: 340 & 540)?



**270 & 271.** Third- to fourth-calendar-year White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*. Buckinghamshire: above, February 1984 (*David Sadler*); below, with Rook *Corvus frugilegus*, January 1984 (*Tim Loseby*)



**Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni* (11, 9, 0)

**1979 Yorkshire, North** Fairburn Ings, ♂, 4th June (S. C. Elliot, S. C. Madge).

**1983 Humberside** Atwick, ♂, 14th June (W. F. Curtis).

(South Europe, west-central and east Asia and northwest Africa) There have now been nine records since 1926 (all except these two being between 1968 and 1974), but they remain as elusive as ever. These are the first in June, but there are now records for all months from February to November, except September.

**Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus* (100, 269, 12)

**Cornwall** Bearah Tor, Bodmin Moor, ♀, 2nd to 3rd June (B. & Mrs D. Inch, J. A. d'E. Miller *et al.*).

**Derbyshire** Alton and Ashover Fabric, ♀ or immature, 6th to 11th September (Miss E. R. Beardon, P. Buxton, P. Shooter *et al.*).

**Devon** Lundy, second-calendar-year ♀, 6th September (B. Jeffries, T. Sargeson). Soar, second-calendar-year, 19th October (P. Sanders).

**Essex** Abberton Reservoir, ♀, 31st October (C. & L. Cornwell, J. Miller).

**Grampian** Auchmacoy, ♂, 29th to 30th May (S. Pritchard).

**Hertfordshire** Hunton Bridge, ♂, 20th June (A. E. Goodall, L. E. Parr).

**Kent** Dungeness, ♂, 20th April (N. C. Frampton, S. McMinn *et al.*). Stour Valley, first-summer ♂, 30th May (W. G. Harvey).

**Norfolk** Northrepps and Overstrand area, ♀, 25th to 26th May (G. Green, C. R. Kightley, T. Wright *et al.*). North Tuddenham, first-summer ♂, 26th to 27th May (B. Bosley, J. D. & Mrs J. E. Geeson *et al.*).

**Somerset** Yoxter, first-summer ♂, 28th July to 3rd August (A. Bevan, S. J. Ellis, D. Glanville *et al.*) (plate 277).

**1982 Yorkshire, South** Potteric Carr, first-summer ♂, 15th May and 2nd June (*Brit. Birds* 77: 518), also 19th May (S. M. Henson, J. A. Hopper); see also 1982 West Yorkshire below.

**1982 Yorkshire, West** Mickletown Ings, ♂, 15th May (B. Townend), same as South Yorkshire individual.

**1984 Norfolk** Holme, ♂, 22nd to at least 24th May (V. Eve, A. J. Hinchcliffe, P. G. D. Morgan *et al.*).

(East Europe and south from Siberia) A typical scatter of records, but the one in Essex was the latest ever, although there have been a number earlier in October. There is also a remarkable January record, for Lancashire in 1963.

**Gyrfalcon** *Falco rusticolus* (many, 79, 2)

**Devon** Fernworthy Reservoir, immature, 18th to 20th February (R. Khan *et al.*). Exminster Marshes, immature, 13th to 16th March (C. M. Harper, D. J. Hopkins, R. H. Montgomery).

**Scilly** St Agnes, immature, 2nd January (Mrs P. Crowther); same, Tresco, 6th, 17th, 19th to 20th (M. Goodey, M. J. Rogers, W. H. Wagstaff *et al.*); same, St Mary's, 12th February (M. J. Rogers). Probably same, Tresco, 7th April (A. R. & Mrs L. J. Coley).

**1982 Cheshire** Burton, probably immature, 10th November; same, Connah's Quay, Clwyd, 12th (Dr R. J. Raines *et al.*).

**1982 Clwyd** See 1982 Cheshire above.

**1982 Shetland** Fair Isle, immature, 12th April (N. J. Riddiford, S. Thomson Jr).

**1984 Highland** Trotternish, Skye, adult, 17th June (T. J. Dix).

(Circumpolar Arctic) Several other records remain under consideration. It is likely that the Devon sightings related to the same individual, though there can be no certainty on the evidence available. Apart from one in Kent in April 1979, Exminster Marshes was host to the last one in southern England, in February 1975, and, what's more, the finder of that bird found this one at Fernworthy!



**Sora** *Porzana carolina* (5, 5, 1)

**Sussex, West** Pagham Lagoon, 26th October, possibly since 24th, to at least 24th December (P. W. Bradbeer, Mr & Mrs A. Ford, E. D. Lloyd *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 79: plates 30-31, 278).

(North America) This obliging individual delighted hundreds of well-behaved observers throughout its two-month stay. There have now been five since 1981; all have arrived during August to October.

**Little Crane** *Porzana parva* (68, 28, 1)

**Sussex, East** Cuckmere Haven, ♀, 6th to 16th March, probably since 3rd (J. Curson, B. A. Goodchild, J. Lyes *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 78: plates 99-101, 146).

(Central and East Europe and West Asia) Another typically early-spring vagrant, there have now been eight March/April records since 1958. The year 1985 will be remembered with fondness by crane-watchers! This much-wanted bird performed at incredibly close range to hundreds of gathered admirers once news of its arrival broke onto the 'grape-vine'. It was so confiding in its chosen open ditch that it even clambered unconcernedly over the photographers' tripods.

**Crane** *Grus grus* (many, 1063, 101)

**Cambridgeshire** Ouse Washes, two, 20th April (T. Baker, I. Johnson *et al.*); first-year, 27th to 1st May (T. Baker, R. W. H. & Mrs H. K. Garner, I. Johnson *et al.*).

**Cornwall** Porthgarra, 11th May (G. C. Barnard).

**Dorset** Lychnett Maltravers, 28th April (B. W. Edwards).

**Essex** Colne Point, four, 9th January (R. Jiggins, T. Runciman per Dr S. Cox), considered same as Norfolk individuals.

**Greater Manchester** Chorlton area, first-year, 24th April (P. Berry, J. Gregory *et al.*).

**Hampshire** Near Andover, 16th April (S. D. Dowell).

**Highland** Dalilea, Loch Shiel, 27th June (S. Gray, S. Littlejohn, H. Millar).

**Kent** Pegwell Bay, four, 10th January (D. Beadle); same, Sandwich Bay, 10th (R. Smith), considered same as Norfolk individuals. Dungeness area, first-year, 6th May (M. Bailey, S. P. Clancy, S. McMinn *et al.*). Folkestone, 71, 25th October (O. & P. French); same, Dungeness, 25th (M. J. Austin).

**Lancashire** Carleton, two, 5th May (P. Guy).

**Lincolnshire** Tetney, two, 17th May (D. Johnson).

**Norfolk** Cley, 19th April (S. J. M. Gantlett, R. Robinson *et al.*); first-year, 21st to 22nd (S. J. M. Gantlett, K. K. Harrison *et al.*). Holme and Titchwell, 21st April (V. Eve, J. Sheldrake, S. Stirrup *et al.*). Ouse Washes, first-year, 20th to 21st April (J. B. Kemp), presumed same as Cambridgeshire individual of 27th to 1st May, above. Heacham, first-year, 27th April to 5th May (H. Ramsey *et al.*), possibly same as Cley individual of 21st to 22nd. East Coast area, four present throughout year except 7th January to 2nd February; juvenile, same area, 30th November onwards (per P. R. Allard). See also Essex, Kent.

**Orkney** Greenay Hill, Mainland, 27th May (E. R. Meek).

**Shetland** Fair Isle, 5th May (P. V. Harvey *et al.*).

**Strathclyde** Near Port Askaig, Islay, 18th May (S. Hulka, M. Plenty).

**Suffolk** Minsmere and area, 22nd and 25th May (T. D. Charlton, J. H. Grant, B. Stanley *et al.*).

**Western Isles** Loch na Liana Moire, South Uist, 27th April (T. J. & Mrs C. Stowe).

**1977 Suffolk** Havergate, 24th May (*Brit. Birds* 71: 498), was on 24th April and finder was R. I. Thorpe.

**1979 Nottinghamshire/South Yorkshire** Newington area, adult, at least 20th June to at least 1st July, last seen Lound, 13th September (*Brit. Birds* 73: 504), also Misson, Nottinghamshire, 7th July (M. C. Carr, S. M. Henson).

**1984 Hampshire** Farlington Marshes, three, 8th April (C. H. Wear); presumed same as Titchfield Haven and Emsworth individuals, 7th (*Brit. Birds* 78: 542).

**1984 Humberside** Blacktoft Sands, two, 26th April (A. Grieve). Near Spurn, 7th and 8th September, Sunk Island, 8th (*Brit. Birds* 78: 542), not present 7th but near Easington 9th and Sunk Island area to at least 15th (per S. M. Lister).

**1984 Sussex, East** Herstmonceux, first-year, 9th May (M. J. Stockman), probably same as Adur Levels, West Sussex, individual, 29th April to 9th May (*Brit. Birds* 78: 542).

(North and central Eurasia, locally south to Turkey) Also, two in Ireland: adult at Boa Island, Lower Lough Erne, Co. Fermanagh, on 8th July; and a juvenile at New Inn, Tipperary, from 4th December into 1986. A typical scatter of records. The small group in Norfolk has been more or less resident since late 1979. This year, they almost certainly visited Essex and Kent briefly, but they have wandered in winter before. The flock of 71 in Kent is the largest number recorded since the classic invasion year of 1963 (when about 500 passed over southern England at the end of October).

**Sandhill Crane** *Grus canadensis* (1, 1, 0)

(North America, Cuba and northeast Siberia) None in Britain or Ireland, but it may be noted here that there was one at Akrabergi, Faroe Islands, on 14th October 1980. It seems that it may have been the same as the one present on Fair Isle, Shetland, from 26th to 27th April 1981 (*Brit. Birds* 76: 105-109); perhaps it over-wintered in Shetland?

**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* (98, 87, 1)

**Cornwall** East and West Looe Rivers, 2nd to 7th April (S. C. Madge *et al.*).

**1984 Greater London** See 1984 Surrey below.

**1984 Surrey** Perry Oaks Sewage-works (*Brit. Birds* 78: 542); locality should be treated as in Greater London.

(Southern Eurasia, Africa and Australia) There have been a number of April records, but this one in Cornwall is the earliest ever, although one over-wintered in Lincolnshire in 1968/69.

**Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni* (5, 15, 1)

**Suffolk** Minsmere, 5th July (N. Bostock, R. H. Chittenden, L. G. R. Evans, M. J. Palmer *et al.*).

(West Asia) An Irish record, previously treated as an unidentified pratincole, has now been accepted as this species: at Ballycarry, Larne Lough, Co. Antrim, on 5th August 1974. All of the positively identified Black-winged Pratincoles have been between July and October, whereas the great majority of Collared Pratincoles have been in May-June. This Minsmere bird occurred on the day of a mass twitch there to see the Greater Yellowlegs which had arrived the day before, but, unlike that bird, it didn't stay as long as many would have wished.

**Pratincole** *Glareola pratincola*/ *G. nordmanni* (36, 66, 2)

**Essex** Steeple, Blackwater Estuary, 8th June (R. G. Gibbs).

(South Europe to West Asia and Africa) Collared Pratincoles were recorded annually from 1976 to 1983, except in 1979, but none has been positively identified in the last two years. The above totals include those specifically identified.



**Killdeer** *Charadrius vociferus* (9, 32, 1)

**Hereford & Worcester** Sink Green, Herefordshire, 10th to at least 15th January (J. L. & Mrs J. V. Fox, A. Marchant *et al.*).

**1983 Central Region** See 1983 Lothian below.

**1983 Lothian** Bo'ness, 16th to at least 30th January (*Brit. Birds* 78: 544); locality is in Central Region and full dates were 16th January to 20th March (per I. J. Andrews).

**1984 Berkshire** Holyport, Maidenhead, 25th to 26th February (*Brit. Birds* 78: 544), also 3rd to 4th March (E. E. Green).

**1984 Western Isles** Askernish, South Uist, 30th December 1983 to 7th January (*Brit. Birds* 77: 521), was first-winter and also seen Kilvaley, South Uist, 22nd (P. R. Boyer).

(North America, West Indies, Peru to Chile) One to five have been recorded annually since 1974, except in 1977. Winter records are normal.

**Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* (0, 6, 1)

**Norfolk** Cley and Blakeney Harbour, 30th July to 22nd August, 2nd September (S. J. M. Gantlett, J. Hampshire, R. Robinson *et al.*).

(Southern Russia east to Mongolia) After the first in 1978, records were annual until 1982, but this is the first since then.

**Lesser Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* (6, 93, 13)

With the exception of that in Humberside, all records apparently related to the North American race *P. d. dominica*.

**Cornwall** Hayle, first-summer, 19th to 26th April (D. S. Flumm, L. P. Williams). Predannack Airfield, age indeterminate, 28th September to 1st October (R. Andrew, E. Griffiths, J. M. Randall *et al.*). Sennen, age indeterminate, 5th October (P. Harrison, V. R. Tucker *et al.*).

**Devon** Winkleigh, juvenile, 13th to 14th October (M. D. & M. J. Preston).

**Gloucestershire** Slimbridge, age indeterminate, 7th to 12th October (R. D. Goater, D. B. Paynter *et al.*).

**Humberside** Fraisthorpe, age indeterminate but showing characters of Asiatic race *P. d. fulva*, 26th January to at least 2nd February (S. M. Lister, D. Page, H. J. Whitehead *et al.*).

**Scilly** St Mary's, first-winter, 1st January (W. H. Wagstaff), first seen 2nd November 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 545); adult, 3rd to 22nd August (Mrs E. Blackwell, C. & Mrs V. Ellis, W. H. Wagstaff *et al.*). St Agnes, juvenile, 7th October; same, St Mary's, 9th to 16th (F. R. Cannings, M. R. Leven *et al.*).

**Shetland** Fair Isle, juvenile, 17th to 20th September (S. J. Aspinall, D. Coutts, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*).

**1984 Cleveland** See 1984 Tyne & Wear below.

**1984 Humberside** Blacktoft Sands, adult, 27th June (P. Adams, A. Grieve).

**1984 Kent** Oakhamness Island, Medway, adult, 22nd July (*Brit. Birds* 78: 544), also 23rd (per D. W. Taylor).

**1984 Scilly** See Scilly above.

**1984 Tyne & Wear** Dorman's Pool and Reclamation Pond, juvenile, 23rd August to 4th October (*Brit. Birds* 78: 545); localities are in Cleveland and was first identified at Greatham Creek, Cleveland, 22nd (A. L. Armstrong).

(North America and Northeast Asia) Three in Ireland: juvenile at Ballycotton, Co. Cork, on 24th September; adult at Rosscarbery, Co. Cork, on 18th October; and juvenile at Shannon Harbour, Co. Offaly, on 5th October. The total of 13 equals the record year of 1984. This former great rarity has, in fact, been found annually in increasing numbers since 1967. The Humberside *fulva* record may well take on more significance as this distinctive race may be set for 'splitting' to full specific status. There are three previous accepted records of *fulva*: another from Humberside, and two (separate) from Lothian.

**Sociable Plover** *Chettusia gregaria* (5, 20, 3)

**Kent** Dartford Marsh, 8th March to 13th April (C. E. Bealey, S. F. Heath *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 78: plate 169).

**Sussex, West** Steyning area, South Downs, juvenile moulting first-winter, 31st October to at least 30th December (C. M. & Mrs B. James, C. E. Messer, Dr J. A. Newnham *et al.*).

(Southeast Russia and west-central Asia) Ireland had its third record: at Blennerville, Co. Kerry, from about 23rd November to about 25th December. There were 16 between 1968 and 1980, but these are only the second, third and fourth since then. The over-wintering bird in Sussex recalls the one on the Suffolk-Essex border in 1977/78.

**Semipalmated Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla* (1, 42, 2)

**Humberside** Easington Lagoon, adult, 13th August (N. A. Bell, M. Leakey, P. Shepherd *et al.*).

**1982 Suffolk** Felixstowe, first-winter, 30th October to at least 14th April 1983 (G. J. Jobson, M. C. Marsh, D. Willis *et al.*).

**1983 Suffolk** See 1982 Suffolk above.

**1984 Kent** Elmley, adult, 21st to 23rd July (*Brit. Birds* 78: 545), last seen 26th (per D. W. Taylor *et al.*).

(North America) Also, one in Ireland: a juvenile at Tacumshin, Co. Wexford, from 21st September to 3rd October. There are two late records from 1984 in Ireland: adult at Ballycotton, Co. Cork, from 4th to 5th July; and two juveniles at Tacumshin, Co. Wexford, on 15th October. Also, a late Irish record from 1982: at Bann Estuary, Co. Londonderry, in mid September (exact date not known).

The 1982 Felixstowe bird, widely held by many observers to have been a Western Sandpiper *C. mauri*, finally gets accepted as Semipalmated! A paper giving the reasons for its identification is to be published shortly. Records have been annual since 1980.

**Least Sandpiper** *Calidris minutilla* (6, 23, 0)

(North America) None in 1985, but a previously accepted record from Toome, Co. Londonderry, on 24th August 1963, has now been rejected by the Northern Ireland Bird Records Committee.

**White-rumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis* (24, 247, 8)

**Avon** Severn Beach, adult, 12th to 13th September (P. D. Bowerman, P. J. Chadwick, B. Lancaster *et al.*).

**Grampian** Ythan Estuary, adult, 31st August (Dr M. V. Bell). Rattray Head, 12th to 13th September (D. C. Butcher, R. A. Schofield, S. T. Spencer).

**Humberside** Beacon Lane Lagoon, Spurn, adult, 7th to 11th August (P. Antrobus, N. A. Bell, S. M. Lister *et al.*).

**Lincolnshire** Welland Estuary, adult, 25th August (P. Clement).

**Norfolk** Pentney Gravel-pits, adult, 26th to 30th August (N. Bostock, A. Curl *et al.*). Titchwell, differing adult, 31st August, 1st and 5th September. (T. Francis, P. K. Greaves, D. Page *et al.*).

**1980 Lothian** Musselburgh, another, 6th to 14th August (*Brit. Birds* 74: 468), also 17th (A. Brown).

**1983 Scilly** Bryher, 24th October (*Brit. Birds* 78: 547), observers should include Rodney Allison not Richard I. Allison.

**1984 Cheshire** Frodsham, adult, 2nd July to 23rd August (*Brit. Birds* 78: 546), also 2nd to 3rd September (W. J. Low, N. C. Machin), 9th (S. M. Lister *et al.*).

**1984 Greater London** See 1984 Surrey below.



**1984 Highland** Wick, adult, 3rd to 5th August (K. W. Banks, S. Laybourne, S. A. Manson).

**1984 Humberside** Blacktoft Sands, adult, 27th July to 2nd August (A. Grieve *et al.*).

**1984 Surrey** Perry Oaks Sewage-works (*Brit. Birds* 78: 547), locality should be treated as in Greater London.

(North America) One in Ireland: at Lough Foyle, Co. Londonderry, on 21st October. A late 1984 record from Ireland involved an adult at Lisagriffin, Co. Cork, from 24th to 25th July, and another late acceptance involves a record from Lough Beg, Co. Londonderry, on 28th October 1973. A poor year by recent standards: the average since 1977 has been 17 per annum. All records fell within the usual July to October period.

### **Baird's Sandpiper** *Calidris bairdii* (5, 112, 4)

**Cheshire** Weaver Bend, juvenile, 6th to 15th September (M. R. Gough, G. S. Spinks *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 78: plates 337-338).

**1983 Cornwall** Davidstow Airfield, juvenile, 15th September (I. Kendall, G. P. Sutton).

**1983 Derbyshire** Barbrook Reservoir, juvenile, 9th to 12th September (*Brit. Birds* 77: 523) was adult.

**1984 Dyfed** Nevern Estuary, adult, 10th August (R. Dobbins).

**1984 Highland** Wick, juvenile, 12th to 15th September (K. W. Banks, S. Laybourne).

(North America and northeast Siberia) Three in Ireland: adult at Ballycotton, Co. Cork, from 6th to 10th September (*Brit. Birds* 78: plates 339 & 340); Tacumshin, Co. Wexford, from 17th to 24th August, and a juvenile there from 19th to 24th September. There has been an average of six per annum since 1974.

### **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** *Calidris acuminata* (5, 11, 3)

**Kent** Elmley, adult, 27th to 28th July (S. J. Broyd, S. W. Gale, R. I. Thorpe *et al.*).

**Lincolnshire** Holbeach Marsh, juvenile, 24th August (P. Clement).

**Lothian** Aberlady Bay, adult, 17th August (G. Anderson, I. J. Andrews, P. R. Gordon *et al.*).

(Northeast Siberia) Three in one autumn is unprecedented. Although annual during 1973-78, there were only two between 1979 and 1984. The Elmley bird is the first to be recorded in July. There are single records for January and April, but all the rest have been in August to October.

### **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus* (23, 70, 6)

**Kent** Elmley, 12th to 15th May (R. I. Thorpe, J. Young *et al.*).

**Norfolk** Breydon Water, two, 17th to 21st May (P. R. Allard *et al.*).

**Orkney** Brodgar, Mainland, 8th to 11th June (E. R. Meek, J. B. Ribbands *et al.*).

**Shetland** Pool of Virkie, 20th to 23rd May (D. Coutts, Dr J. N. Darroch, A. Fitchett *et al.*).

**Warwickshire** Lea Marston, 1st to 4th June (A. R. Dean *et al.*).

**1972 Suffolk** Minsmere, 7th May; 10th to 20th May previously accepted (*Brit. Birds* 66: 342), but now considered unacceptable after review.

**1973 Norfolk** Cley, 28th to 29th May, previously accepted (*Brit. Birds* 67: 324), but now considered unacceptable after review.

**1982 Norfolk** Cley, 26th to 28th May (*Brit. Birds* 78: 548), also 29th (K. Brown, S. M. Henson, J. A. Hopper).

**1984 Humberside** Blacktoft Sands, three: 18th May (A. Grieve); 28th to 1st June (A. Grieve, P. Martin, D. Page *et al.*); 13th to 15th (A. Grieve *et al.*).

**1984 Lincolnshire** Saltfleetby, 19th May (B. M. Clarkson).

(North Eurasia) Ireland had its fifth record: a juvenile at Broadlough, Co. Wicklow, from 7th to 8th September. The 1984 total reaches a record 12, including this remarkable series of three different individuals at Blacktoft. Before 1982, no year had produced more than three. The now

rejected birds from East Anglia in 1972 and 1973 were almost certainly Dunlins *Calidris alpina*; identifications easier to achieve in retrospect now that Broad-billed Sandpiper is so much better known.

**Stilt Sandpiper** *Micropalama himantopus* (1, 14, 2)

**Kent** Dungeness, adult, 22nd August (N. R. Davies *et al.*).

**Suffolk** Minsmere, adult, 4th to 10th May (D. J. Bowes, G. W. & R. Follows, S. J. M. Gantlett *et al.*) (fig. 3).

(North America) The long-staying one in Cheshire in 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 549) must have got itself onto hundreds of life-lists but the second to be recorded at Minsmere also stayed long enough for it to be widely appreciated. Most have been in July to September; the Minsmere bird was the first to have turned up in May.

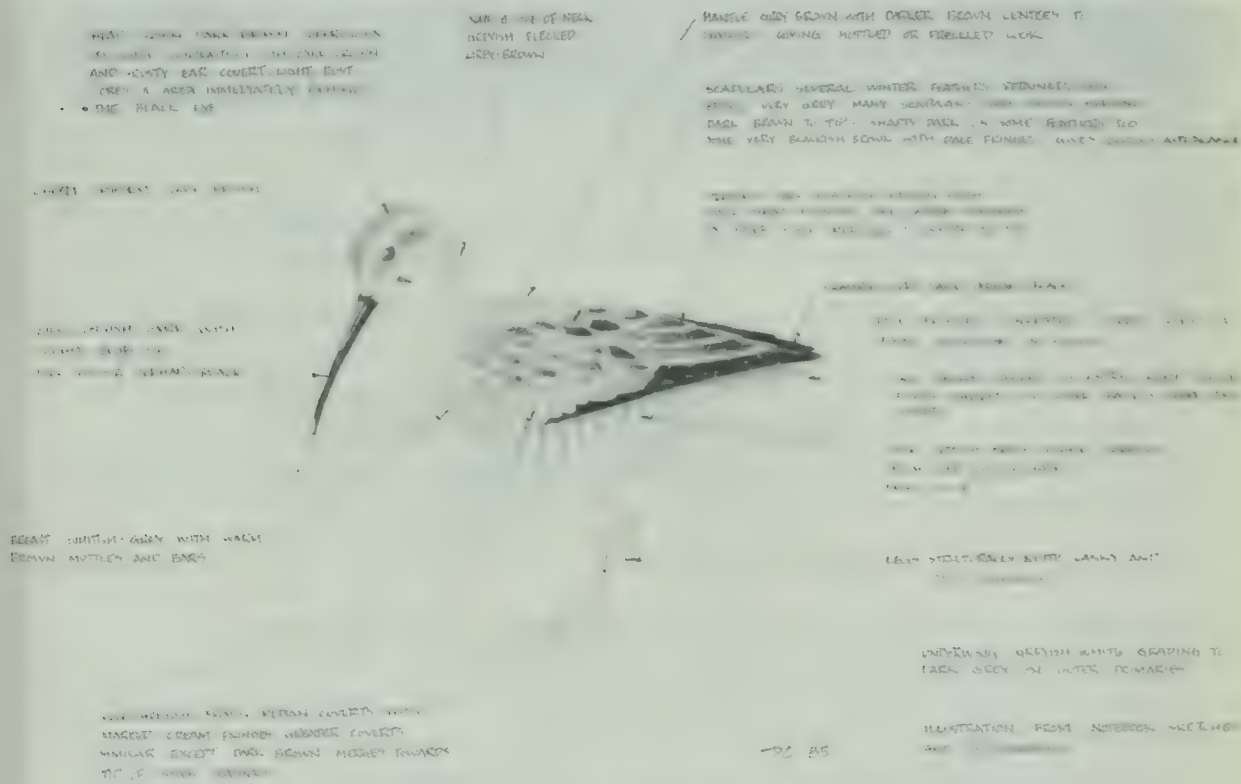


Fig. 3. Adult Stilt Sandpiper *Micropalama himantopus*, Suffolk, May 1985 (Trevor Charlton)

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* (33, 412, -)

**1981 Cornwall** Sennen, 30th September to 1st October (N. M. Butler, S. P. Fisher, S. C. Hutchings *et al.*).

(North America) No longer considered by the Committee, but this record takes the 1981 total to 16. A late record also comes from Ireland and involves one at Lough Beg, Co. Londonderry, on 5th September 1976.

**Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* (180, 53, 1)

**Shetland** Fair Isle, 30th August to 7th September (D. R. Bird, N. J. Riddiford, D. Suddaby *et al.*).

**1983 Humberside** Near Barton-on-Humber, 23rd to 24th March (I. Lonsdale, R. Lyon).

(Northeast Europe and Northwest Asia) A late record from Ireland involved one at Dursey Island, Co. Cork, on 22nd October 1983. There has been one on Fair Isle in September in four out of the last five years, during which time there have been only three records elsewhere.



**Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus* (4, 0, 1)

(North America) None in Britain, but one in Ireland: a juvenile at Tacumshin, Co. Wexford, from 30th September to 2nd October. This is the first record accepted since the identification characters have been better understood (*Brit. Birds* 78: 506). The last accepted record prior to this was in Norfolk in 1957, but this pre-BBRC record and three old specimen records (1862, 1872 and 1902) are still under review by the BOU Records Committee (*Brit. Birds* 74: 471).

**Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* (9, 88, 8)

**Cornwall** Davidstow, juvenile, 21st to 25th October (G. P. Sutton *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 79: plates 5-6).

**Dumfries & Galloway** Caerlaverock, juvenile, 1st to 9th October (Dr C. D. Campbell, R. H. Hogg, G. Macdonald *et al.*).

**Essex** Heybridge Gravel-pits, juvenile, 29th September to 5th October (J. Fitzpatrick *et al.*); presumed same, Old Hall Marshes, 15th October (G. B. Brown *et al.*).

**Gloucestershire** Slimbridge, juvenile, 26th September to 18th October (L. P. Alder, R. D. Goater, M. Smart *et al.*).

**Gwent** Peterstone Wentloog, age indeterminate, 14th September (C. Jones, N. Odin).

**Scilly** St Mary's, first-winter, 19th to 24th December (Ms C. A. Mumford, M. J. Rogers, W. H. Wagstaff *et al.*).

**1984 Cornwall** Davidstow, first-winter, 21st to at least 29th October (A. H. J. Harrop *et al.*).

(North America and Northeast Siberia) Two in Ireland: at Lough Beg, Co. Londonderry, on 10th April; and a juvenile at Tacumshin, Co. Wexford, from 25th September to 4th October. An about average year. Over-wintering records are not that unusual, but mid December does seem an odd time for an arrival in Scilly.

**Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus*/*L. scolopaceus* (31, 188, 12)

**Sussex, East** Willingdon Level, age indeterminate, 28th December (J. H. Marchant).

(North America and Northeast Siberia) In Ireland, one at Bann Estuary, Co. Derry, from 29th September to 1st October, and one at Kilcoole/Newcastle, Co. Wicklow, from 15th to 20th October. Records from Alton Water, Suffolk, and other Suffolk and Essex localities are still under consideration by the Committee. The above totals include those specifically identified.

**Little Whimbrel** *Numenius minutus* (0, 1, 1)

**Norfolk** Blakeney, Cley and Salthouse area, age uncertain, 24th August to 3rd September (P. Antrobus, J. Gregory, R. J. Walker *et al.*) (plate 272).

(Central and Northeast Siberia) Found on a bank-holiday weekend by birders looking for the Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*; news spread like wild-fire and within two hours 400 birders were watching it. Over the whole weekend, it was estimated that more than 3,000 people had seen it, making it surely the biggest twitch ever! The only other British record was at almost exactly the same time of year, at Sker, Mid Glamorgan, from 30th August to 6th September 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 76: 438-445).



272. Little Whimbrel *Numenius minutus*, Norfolk, August 1985 (D. M. Cottridge)

**Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis* (12, 44, 3)

dark centres to most scapulars/coverts with  
brighter buff edges - one or two fading thought

tips of primaries extending to tip of  
tail

dark streaking from crown to mantle  
(looked paler in poor light)

g. broad off-white super.

fine, all dark bill

faint barring on sides of tail

bright, clean white underparts

long, stilt-like legs, dull yellow

wedge of white extending up back

supercilia meeting above bill, pale forehead

trailing legs

dark primaries contrasting with secondaries

faint streaking extending  
onto sides of upper breast

white extending from throat down  
onto underparts, breaking breast

1st S / adult moulting out of breeding plumage? contrast between outer & inner primaries  
darker centres to scapulars/coverts still largely predominant, but buff edges fine streaking  
extending onto sides of upper breast - rest of underparts pure white. dull yellow legs

Fig. 4 Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*, Northumberland, July 1985 (M. G. Watson)



**Humberside** Spurn, 21st August (N. A. Bell).

**Norfolk** Near Wolferton Marsh, 19th to 25th May (T. Callaway, N. J. Holton *et al.*).

**Northumberland** Hauxley Pools and Cresswell Pond, 13th to 15th July (K. D. Shaw, M. G. Watson *et al.*) (fig. 4).

**1984 Kent** Elmley, at least 23rd April (*Brit. Birds* 78: 550), to 2nd May (per D. W. Taylor); presumed another, 16th June (D. Belshaw, R. I. Thorpe *et al.*); presumed another, 8th to 19th August (J. Gooders, W. E. Oddie *et al.*).

**1984 Norfolk** Titchwell, 25th May (*Brit. Birds* 78: 550), finder was W. T. Appleyard. Cley, 16th August to at least 3rd September (*Brit. Birds* 78: 550), also 4th (B. & Mrs E. Kerr, Dr I. H. Leach *et al.*).

**1984 Sussex, West** Waltham Brooks, 8th to 11th July (J. Dixon, Dr M. E. Kalaher, A. J. Prater *et al.*).

(Southeast Europe, and West and East Asia; has recently bred in Finland) Records have been annual since 1976, with an average of four per annum. The series of three apparently different individuals at Elmley in 1984 is noteworthy.

**Greater Yellowlegs** *Tringa melanoleuca* (12, 14, 2)

**Highland** Loch Sligachan, Skye, 19th May (W. T. Appleyard).

**Suffolk** Minsmere, discontinuously, 4th July to 14th August (I. Boyd, T. D. Charlton *et al.*).

(North America) There have now been just eight in Britain since 1958. The Skye record is the first in spring, apart from one which apparently over-wintered in Co. Kerry in 1982/83. The long stay of the Minsmere bird was much appreciated, but it could also be aggravating at times as it disappeared for days at a time.

**Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* (35, 150, 2)

**Norfolk** Hickling, 24th to 27th June (I. Haynes, S. E. Linsell).

(North America) Also, one in Ireland: a juvenile at Ballycotton, Co. Cork, from 6th November into 1986. A late 1983 record involved one at Ballycotton, Co. Cork, on 13th October (in addition to one there from 7th to 14th October). The first blank autumn in Britain since 1960. The average since 1976 has been seven, and since then only 1979 has produced so few records.

**Solitary Sandpiper** *Tringa solitaria* (6, 17, 1)

**Scilly** St Mary's, 30th August (M. Goodey *et al.*).

(North America) Of the 12 since 1974, six have been in Scilly.

**Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* (3, 21, 0)

**1983 Hampshire** Langstone Harbour, 9th to 11th July (R. I. Thorpe, J. M. Walters).

(Northeast Europe and Siberia) The last record came from the same locality, on 23rd May 1984, so it seems possible that one returning bird was involved. One or two have been seen in all but three of the last 15 years. The year 1985 was the first blank since 1980.

**Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularia* (6, 71, 1)

**Scilly** Tresco, adult, 4th to 21st October (H. Mittendorf *et al.*).

**1983 Orkney** Sule Skerry, adult, 30th July to 4th August (T. Bagworth, G. Barker, A. Lowe).

**1983 Scilly** Tresco, juvenile, 16th to at least 19th September (the late D. B. Hunt, R. Still *et al.*).

**1984 Dorset** Stanpit Marsh, juvenile, 14th September (G. Armstrong).

**1984 Yorkshire, South** Worsborough Reservoir, Barnsley, adult, 29th July to 5th August (J. D. H. Brown, M. & T. Kilburn *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 77: plate 241).

(North America) A late record from Ireland involves a juvenile at Union Hall, Co. Cork, on 28th September 1978. The average for the last ten years has been four, and this is the poorest year since the blank year of 1972. It has been suggested that the 1984 South Yorkshire bird might have been an annually returning individual, since an adult has been recorded in that region each autumn since 1981.

**Wilson's Phalarope** *Phalaropus tricolor* (1, 174, 13)

**Avon** Chew Valley Lake, first-winter, 16th to 18th October (A. F. A. Hawkins, R. J. Higgins, D. Lawrence *et al.*).

**Cleveland** Long Drag Pools and Reclamation Pond, juvenile moulting to first-winter, 26th August to 10th September (T. Francis, P. Hinley *et al.*).

**Cornwall** Landulph Marsh, first-winter, 4th to 6th October (P. Edmonds, A. H. J. Harrop, M. D. Rayment *et al.*).

**Devon** Moorstone Barton, Cullompton, adult, 11th to 12th August (J. Maunder, Dr R. W. Whittesley).

**Gloucestershire** Slimbridge, juvenile moulting to first-winter, 14th September (R. D. Goater, D. B. Paynter), probably same as Hereford & Worcester individual below.

**Hereford & Worcester** Upton Warren, 14th September (A. Shaw).

**Lincolnshire** Covenham Reservoir, juvenile moulting to first-winter, 19th to 21st August (K. Robinson *et al.*).

**Lothian** Aberlady, age indeterminate, 31st August (K. Heron *et al.*).

**Northumberland** Cresswell Pond, first-winter, 1st September (L. Hall, K. W. Regan *et al.*).

**Sussex, East** Rye, first-winter, 9th October (W. B. Marrison, Dr B. J. Yates *et al.*).

**1980 Cheshire** Northwich, juvenile moulting to first-winter, 27th September to 4th October (D. & R. Elphick, T. E. Helvin).

**1984 Cambridgeshire** Grafham Water, first-winter, 7th to at least 9th October (*Brit. Birds* 78: 552), also 10th (M. J. Palmer). Ouse Washes, 29th October to at least 3rd November (*Brit. Birds* 78: 552), again 4th (L. G. R. Evans), 13th (S. J. Dodgson, P. A. J. Morris).

**273.** Juvenile Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*, Co. Cork, September 1985 (Barry O'Mahony)





**1984 Lincolnshire** Anderby Creek, 3rd October (*Brit. Birds* 78: 552), not same as Gibraltar Point individual, 11th September to 5th October (per G. P. Catley).

(North America) Four in Ireland: juvenile (trapped) at Lough Beg, Cork Harbour, Co. Cork, from 4th to 12th September (plate 273); juvenile, Swords Estuary, Co. Dublin, from 12th to 29th September; juvenile, Bull Island, Co. Dublin, on 23rd September; and juvenile at Tacumshin, Co. Wexford, from 22nd August to 27th September. An about average year. For American waders as a whole, this was a poor year in terms of number of individuals, yet it was the best year since 1975 in terms of variety, with 16 species (including Pectoral *Calidris melanotos* and Buff-breasted Sandpipers *Tryngites subruficollis*).

### **Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* (2, 41, 0)

**Tyne & Wear** Newcastle General Hospital area, second-winter, throughout January-February to 18th March, also near Jesmond Dene, Newcastle, 23rd January, Tynemouth, 16th May; presumed same, now adult, Newcastle General Hospital area, 4th November to at least March 1986 (per M. S. Hodgson). See also 1984 Tyne & Wear below.

**1983 Humberside** Humberside Wildfowl Refuge, adult, 5th September (T. E. Dixon).

**1984 Tyne & Wear** North Shields, first-winter, 11th to 12th February (*Brit. Birds* 78: 554), first seen Blaydon, 22nd to 25th January (B. Galloway, I. Kerr, B. Little *et al.*); also at Newcastle General Hospital on 17th March, 4th April.

(North America) Since 1974, only 1976, 1982 and 1985 have failed to produce any new records; the average for the last ten years has been three. The Newcastle bird has stayed on into 1986, its fourth year of residence.

### **Franklin's Gull** *Larus pipixcan* (0, 10, 1)

**Western Isles** North Boisdale, South Uist, adult, 6th to 14th August (T. J. Stowe, M. Tonkin *et al.*) (plate 274).



(North America) The second occurred as recently as 1977, but since then one or two have been seen annually, except in 1979. This is the third for Scotland, and the first record in August.

**274.** Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan*, Western Isles, August 1985 (M. C. Dennis)

### **Bonaparte's Gull** *Larus philadelphia* (11, 36, 1)

(North America) None in Britain, but one in Ireland: an adult at Wexford Harbour, Co. Wexford, on 8th April. One to five have been recorded annually since 1979. There have been only three blank years since 1967 (1974, 1976 and 1978).

### **Ring-billed Gull** *Larus delawarensis* (0, 356, 100)

**Avon** Barrow Gurney Reservoir, second-year, 16th February (T. E. Bond, M. G. Chaffley). Chew Valley Lake, first-year, 10th March: adult, 16th to 20th (K. E. Vinicombe *et al.*); second-winter, 27th (A. D. Whatley).

**Cornwall** Drift Reservoir, first-winter, two, 5th January, one to 6th (H. P. K. Robinson).

Helston, first-winter, 13th January (B. R. Field, A. H. J. Harrop *et al.*); adult, 23rd January (M. P. Semmens). Siblyback Reservoir, adult, 30th January; first-winter, 8th February (P. G. Akers, D. J. Chown); another adult, 9th February (P. G. Akers, D. J. Chown, J. A. d'E. Miller). Par, two adults, 10th February (P. G. Akers, D. J. Chown). Padstow, first-winter, 13th to 14th and 23rd February (P. G. Akers, D. J. Chown, M. A. Hallett). River Lynher, first-winter, 27th February (S. C. Madge). Sennen, first-winter, 9th March (H. P. K. Robinson). Hayle, first-winter, first seen 7th December 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 554), irregularly to 25th February, again, 6th May (D. S. Flumm *et al.*); second-winter, 1st to 3rd March (J. Hawkey, G. C. Hearl, L. P. Williams); first-winter, 3rd to 11th March (D. S. Flumm, J. Hawkey *et al.*); second-winter, at least 16th October (L. P. Williams *et al.*). Marazion, second-winter, 2nd and 16th March (W. R. Hirst, L. P. Williams). Millbrook, first-summer, 6th to 8th March, 1st April to 6th May (K. Pellow *et al.*), same, as second-winter, 27th December (S. C. Madge); also seen in Devon; adult, 16th November to 1st December (A. H. J. & Mrs J. Harrop, S. C. Madge *et al.*). Swanpool, Falmouth, adult, 18th to 23rd December (A. R. Pay).

**Devon** Slapton Ley, first-winter, 11th February (J. C. Nicholls). Plymouth Hoe, first-winter, 15th to 16th January and 12th February (J. F. Babbington, R. M. Belringer, R. Crossley *et al.*); another first-winter, 29th March (P. Carthy, A. H. J. Harrop), and 4th April (P. A. J. Morris, C. M. Poole *et al.*). Plymouth, first-winter, intermittently, 27th January to at least 8th May (P. Aley, B. R. Field, M. D. Rayment *et al.*), also seen at Millbrook, Cornwall, intermittently, 7th March to 7th May. River Plym, adult, 3rd to 4th April (J. F. Babbington, B. R. Field, A. H. J. Harrop *et al.*). Paignton, second-winter, 12th December to at least January 1986 (M. R. A. & R. E. Bailey, M. Langman). Preston and Hopes Nose, see 1984 Devon below.

**Dorset** West Bexington, adult, 17th March (P. G. Akers, D. J. Chown, M. A. Hallett).

**Dyfed** Llanstadwell, adult, 6th to 13th February (G. H. Rees *et al.*). Aberystwyth, adult, 28th March (H. W. Roderick).

**Essex** Leigh-on-Sea, second-winter, 13th to at least 17th August (P. M. Griggs, J. Miller *et al.*) (plate 275).

**Glamorgan, South** Roath Park Lake, Cardiff, adult, 18th to 27th December (K. R. Lloyd, N. Odin *et al.*), presumed same, Llanishen Reservoir, 27th (R. H. Harrop, N. Odin) and 30th (P. Bristow).

**Grampian** Kingston, Moray, adult, 29th December (M. J. H. Cook).

**Greater London** Barn Elms Reservoirs, first-winter moulting to first-summer, 19th April (R. E. Innes).

**Lothian** Musselburgh, first-winter, 2nd April (C. C. McGuigan *et al.*); presumed same, moulting to first-summer, 7th April to 1st May (A. Brown *et al.*).

**Northumberland** Boulmer, first-winter, 15th April (B. Galloway).

**Somerset** Sutton Bingham Reservoir, adult, 18th to 19th December (D. J. Chown, R. Newton).

**Strathclyde** Munnoch Reservoir, Ardrossan, Ayr, adult, 9th and 13th January (J. L. Burton, E. Leyden, D. M. Watt). Doonfoot, Ayr, adult, 21st to 24th February (R. H. Hogg, H. J. Millar *et al.*).

**Suffolk** Trimley Lake, second-winter, 28th September (J. R. Askins).

**Sussex, East** Crumbles, Eastbourne, second-winter, 15th to 25th December (J. F. & Mrs D. Cooper, R. K. Haggard *et al.*).

**Sussex, West** Shoreham-by-Sea, first-winter, 11th and 22nd January (K. Noble, A. J. Prater *et al.*).

**1983 Dorset** Radipole, first-winter, 4th December to January 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 77: 538), remained until mid July (per M. Cade).

**1984 Cornwall** Hayle, 7th December (*Brit. Birds* 78: 554), see 1985 above.

**1984 Cumbria** Ramsdale, adult, 23rd December (T. Dean *et al.*).

**1984 Devon** Preston and Hopes Nose, first-winter, 27th December to 4th April 1985 (J. C. Nicholls *et al.*).

**1984 Dorset** Radipole, adult, first seen 28th December 1983 (*Brit. Birds* 77: 530), again, 4th to 5th February 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 555), involved two individuals, that from 1983 staying to 11th April 1984, the other only on 4th to 5th February 1984 (M. Cade, G. Walbridge *et al.*). West Bexington, adult, 21st December (*Brit. Birds* 78: 555), not to be considered same as Radipole individual (per D. J. Chown).

**1984 Dyfed** Aberystwyth, two, possibly three adults: single sightings, 1st to 5th March, 7th to



8th, 11th, 13th, 15th, two 29th; one of same, 3rd April (*Brit. Birds* 78: 555); one of same, 18th March (C. C. McGuigan, A. M. Stoddart *et al.*).

**1984 Glamorgan, Mid** See 1984 West Glamorgan below.

**1984 Glamorgan, South** Roath Park Lane (*Brit. Birds* 78: 555) should read Roath Park Lake.

**1984 Glamorgan, West** Kenfig Pool and Sker Point, first-winter, 4th to 5th December, locality is in Mid Glamorgan.

**1984 Glamorgan, West** Blackpill, adult, 13th to 17th April (R. H. Davies, S. Murray, I. F. Tew), additional to those already published (*Brit. Birds* 78: 555).

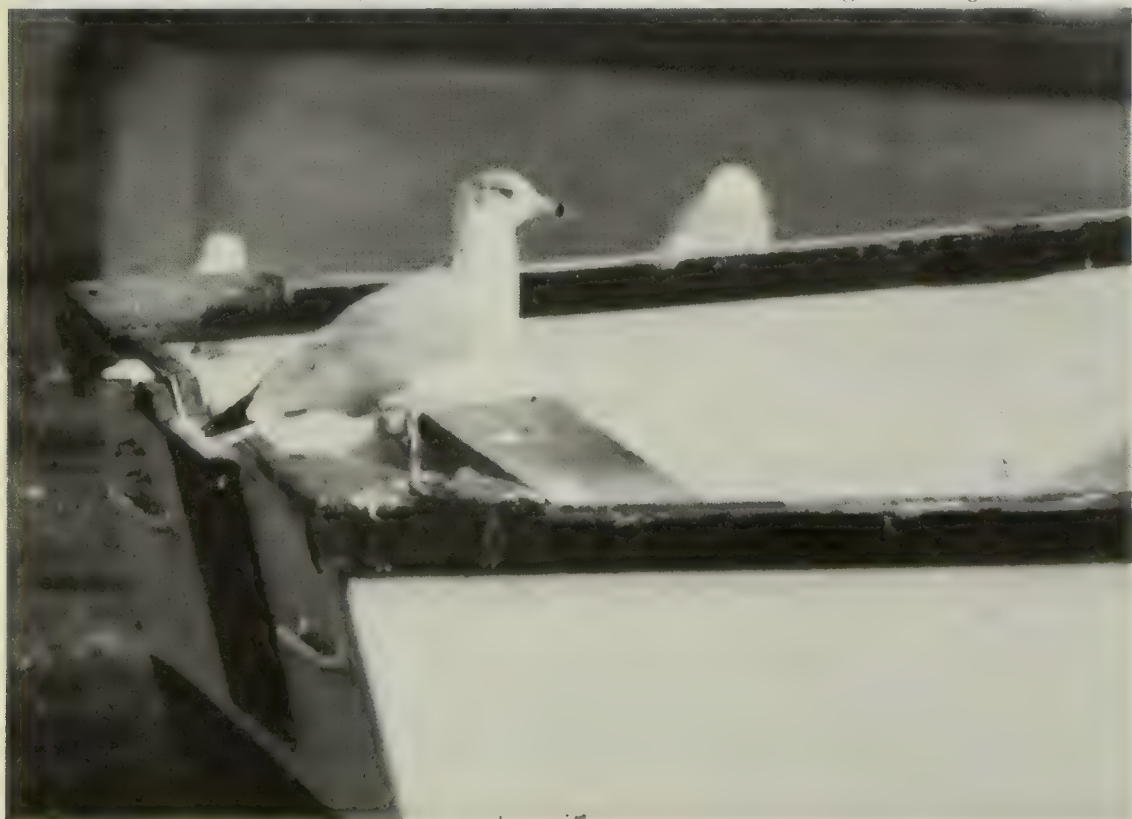
**1984 Gwent** Llandegfedd Reservoir, adult (*Brit. Birds* 78: 555), seen only on 19th (P. A. Dean, C. Jones) and 29th (L. W. Austin, S. J. Hayhow, N. Odin).

**1984 Northamptonshire** Ditchford Gravel-pits, adult, 29th March (S. P. Fisher).

**1984 Strathclyde** Doonfoot, Ayr, first-winter moulting to first-summer, 11th April, previously rejected (*Brit. Birds* 78: 587), now accepted after review.

(North America) A total of about 58 was recorded in Ireland in 1985: at Belfast Harbour Estate and Whitehouse, Co. Antrim/Co. Down, three adults noted at the end of 1984 increased to eight on 12th March (all adults) with one still there on 6th April, but a new bird (a first-year) from 10th to 25th April. Two adults present there again from 18th November, with a second-year from 23rd November, and a new second-year from 22nd December: making a total of four present into 1986; adult at Lurgan, Co. Armagh, on 27th January; adult at Newcastle, Co. Down, from late 1984 until 14th January 1985, present again from 17th November into 1986; adult at Bann Estuary, Co. Londonderry, on 1st September; adult and a second-winter at Ballyallia Lake, Co. Clare, on 5th February; a first-winter at The Lough, Co. Cork, from 14th January to 22nd February, with two first-winters there on 19th January, and an adult there from 19th January to 22nd February; adult at Little Island, Co. Cork, on 16th February; a first-winter at Rosslague, Cork Harbour, Co. Cork, on 17th March; a

**275.** Second-winter Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*, Essex, August 1985 (*J. Miller*)



first-summer at Courtmacsherry Bay, Co. Cork, on 21st April; juvenile at The Lough, Co. Cork, from 20th September to 29th December, a second-winter there from 10th November into 1986, a first-winter there from 26th December into 1986, and an adult there from 29th December into 1986; adult, Clonakilty, Co. Cork, on 26th December; a first-winter at Sandy-mount, Dublin, from 3rd January to 8th July, another first-winter there from 3rd January until 24th July, a second-winter there from 12th January to 9th July, another second-winter there from 28th February to 9th July, adult there from 26th March to 11th April, a first-summer there from 8th June to 8th August, adult there on 18th October, a first-winter there from 1st to 2nd November, and a second-winter there on 24th December; four adults at Galway Docks, Co. Galway, on 10th March, with one present on 9th March; a first-winter at Caherciveen, Co. Kerry, on 3rd January; adult at Blennerville, Co. Kerry, on 23rd February; a first-summer and a second-winter at Dingle, Co. Kerry, on 24th August; two adults and two second-winters at Limerick City, Co. Limerick, on 17th March, with one adult there from 9th February to 3rd April and one adult there on 30th March, also a second-winter there on 23rd November; three first-winters at Belmullet, Co. Mayo, on 17th March, one remaining to 18th March; two adults at Sligo Harbour, Co. Sligo, on 29th December, one remaining into 1986; a first-winter at Kinsalebeg, Co. Waterford, on 13th January; a first-winter at North Slob, Co. Wexford, on 5th May; and a second-winter at Wexford town, Co. Wexford, from 14th December into 1986.

A late 1984 record involved an adult at Clonakilty, Co. Cork, from 10th to 14th August.

Also, a late 1984 record from Le Hurel, Jersey, Channel Islands: adult on 30th November.

Numerous further records, including six in Dorset and at least ten in South Wales, remain to be considered by the Committee. A paper analysing the occurrence patterns of this species has recently been published (*Brit. Birds* 78: 327-337). In 1985, records just reached three figures for the first time, making this now by far the commonest species considered by the Committee. It might seem that Ring-billed Gull is set for dropping from the list of species considered, but this is unlikely whilst the rejection rate (41% in 1985) is so high. This is always a difficult species to identify and requires careful observation, but the Committee notes that there is a problem particularly with second-year Herring Gulls *L. argentatus* being claimed as first-year Ring-billeds. Observers are urged to take extreme care when identifying this species: the essential reference is P. J. Grant's *Gulls: a guide to identification* (2nd edn, 1986).

### **Iceland Gull** *Larus glaucoides* (0, 5, 1)

Individuals showing the characters of the North American race *L. g. kumlieni*, colloquially known as 'Kumlien's Gull', were recorded as follows: **Grampian** Banff Bay, adult, showing characters of North American race *L. g. kumlieni*, 17th March (Miss K. M. D. Bushby, J. G. Steele).

(Baffin Island and northwest Ungava Peninsula, Canada) A late record from Ireland involves an adult at Portavogie, Co. Down, from 2nd to 4th



January 1981. Records have been annual since 1981, except for 1984; surely they were overlooked before?

**Ross's Gull** *Rhodostethia rosea* (2, 41, 2)

**Strathclyde** Ayr Harbour, adult, 2nd to 3rd February (A. A. Murray *et al.*).

**1984 Highland** Thurso, adult, 12th November 1984 to at least 7th January (*Brit. Birds* 78: 558), also 19th (S. Laybourne).

(Northeast Siberia, Greenland and Canada) Also, one in Ireland: a first-winter at Cobh, Co. Cork, on 24th February. Some typical records: two is about average for the last ten years.

**Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* (53, 169, 1)

**Dyfed** Strumble Head, 30th July (R. Dobbins).

**1974 Norfolk** Blakeney Point, juvenile or first-winter, 25th August (*British Birds* 68: 321), now withdrawn by observer.

(Almost cosmopolitan, nearest breeding colony in Denmark) A late 1984 record from Ireland involved one at Bridges of Ross, Co. Clare, on 21st September. A previously accepted record, from Herdman Channel, Belfast, Co. Antrim, on 16th August 1957, has now been rejected by the Northern Ireland Bird Records Committee. Since the blank year of 1970, only 1981 has been as poor with just one record.

**Caspian Tern** *Sterna caspia* (30, 133, 2)

**Fife** Anstruther, 8th September (C. & Mrs A.-M. Smout).

**Suffolk** Minsmere, 8th June (S. Young).

**At Sea** Sea area Dover, 6th August (J. T. Smith).

**1984 Staffordshire** Alton, 26th April (N. Ratcliffe).

**1984 Suffolk** Benacre, 8th July (J. Minihane, C. S. Waller).

(Almost cosmopolitan except South America, but everywhere local) A late 1984 record from Ireland involved one at Lough Derravaragh, Co. Westmeath, on 20th July. Some typical records; the average for the past ten years has been five.

**Lesser Crested Tern** *Sterna bengalensis* (0, 3, 1)

**Devon** Dawlish Warren, 17th to at least 20th July (D. J. Barker, D. J. Hopkins, P. M. Mayer *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 78: plate 243).

**Northumberland** Farne Islands, ♀, 16th May to 18th July (L. Austin, K. J. Rideout *et al.*).

**1982 Gwynedd** Cymyran Bay, Anglesey, 13th July (J. Chester, C. Hurford).

**1983 Norfolk** Blakeney Point, intermittently, 9th August to 17th September (S. J. M. Gantlett, J. Reed *et al.*); same Scolt Head, 27th August, and Holme, 29th (per S. J. M. Gantlett) (*Brit. Birds* 76: plate 231).

**1984 Cleveland** Seaton Snook, 17th to 20th June (T. Francis, G. Iceton, P. Johnson, R. T. McAndrew *et al.*); same, South Gare, 18th to 19th (D. J. Britton *et al.*), and Redcar, 20th (B. Foster).

**1984 Northumberland** Farne Islands, 4th to 13th August (G. Odie, K. J. Rideout *et al.*).

(North Africa, and East Africa east to Australia) The long-staying and well-watched bird at Blakeney Point in 1983 led to much discussion over (and research into) the identification problems of this species. A paper is shortly to be published covering the identification of large terns. The Anglesey bird in 1982 is the first accepted record for Britain and Ireland; it is interesting to note that it appeared at the same time that an Elegant Tern *Sterna elegans* (which has yet to be accepted) was frequenting a colony of

Sandwich Terns *S. sandvicensis* just across the Irish Sea in Co. Down. Clearly, terneries are worth checking carefully! The Northumberland and Cleveland sightings are assumed to relate to the same bird (indeed it returned to the Farne Islands again in 1986), and that in Norfolk may also have been the same individual.

### **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* (0, 8, 3)

**Lothian** Musselburgh and Granton Harbour, Edinburgh, age uncertain, 6th October to 9th November (I. J. Andrews, P. R. Gordon, Dr L. L. J. Vick *et al.*).

(North America) There were five records in Ireland, but the first four listed here refer to the same individual: adult near Termonfeckin, Co. Louth, on 3rd August; same at Dundalk Harbour, Co. Louth, from 7th to 8th September; same Glogher Head, Co. Louth, on 21st September; same Bull Island, Co. Dublin, from 16th November into 1986; and a first-winter at Dungarvan Harbour, Co. Waterford, from 26th January to 2nd February. There are also two late 1984 records (of one bird) from Ireland: at Groomsport, Co. Down, from 19th to 20th March; and at Quoile Pondage, Co. Down, from 1st May to 1st June. Three in one year is a new peak, and Scotland had its first. The first in Britain and Ireland was as recent as 1980. The increase seems likely to be linked with the northward spread on the east coast of America (*BIWP* Vol. 4, page 103) as much as with increased observer-awareness. Forster's Tern over-winters well north in the USA, so the winter records on this side of the Atlantic are not surprising.

### **Bridled Tern** *Sterna anaethetus* (3, 7, 0)

**1984 Dorset** Lodmoor, adult, 11th July (M. Cade).

(Oceanic islands from Caribbean east to Philippines and Australia) This record came just a month after the well-watched bird at Rutland Water, Leicestershire, and, interestingly, just two days after the Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* seen in Kent and East Sussex (*Brit. Birds* 78: 559).

### **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybridus* (20, 61, 2)

**Sussex, West** Worthing, 25th May (Dr J. A. Newnham, D. I. Smith).

(South Eurasia, Northwest, East and Southern Africa, and Australia) One in Ireland: an adult at Kilmacsimon, Co. Cork, from 28th July to about 3rd August. Two in a year is about normal; 1970 remains much the best year, with nine.

### **White-winged Black Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus* (50, 453, 11)

**Cleveland** Long Drag Pools, adult, 29th June (J. R. Duffie *et al.*); adult, 31st July to 5th August (M. Davidson, J. B. Dunnett, J. E. Williams *et al.*). Dorman's Pool, juvenile, 1st September (E. Kwater *et al.*).

**Gwynedd** Llyn Alaw, Anglesey, 23rd May (J. E. Clark, K. G. Croft *et al.*).

**Lancashire** Near Lea Marsh, adult, 16th August (D. Melbourne, J. Wilson).

**Norfolk** Welney, 6th to 8th June (J. B. Kemp *et al.*).

**Orkney** Loch of Harray, Mainland, adult, 23rd to 25th June (S. Headley, E. R. Meek *et al.*).

**Suffolk** Minsmere, first-summer, 31st May and 3rd to 4th June (T. D. Charlton, J. H. Grant, A., F. M. & K. H. Thomas *et al.*).

**1983 Humberside** See 1984 Humberside below.



**1984 Cambridgeshire** Peterborough, juvenile, 29th to 30th September (R. I. Thorpe *et al.*).

**1984 Humberside** Tophill Low Reservoirs, adult, 22nd June (*Brit. Birds* 78: 560), was in 1983.

**1984 Kent** Dungeness, adult, 18th to 21st June (*Brit. Birds* 78: 560), 21st only.

(Southeast Europe, West and East Asia) Also, two in Ireland: adult at Oxford Island, Lough Neagh, Co. Armagh, from 2nd to 4th September; and an adult at Strand Lough, Co. Down, from 29th to 30th May. A late 1984 record from Ireland involved an adult at Bridges of Ross, Co. Clare, on 19th September. The average over the past ten years has been 22, and the nine in Britain represent the lowest total since 1965. Interestingly, the spring was about average, but the autumn was well down on normal.

**Brünnich's Guillemot** *Uria lomvia* (3, 16, 1)

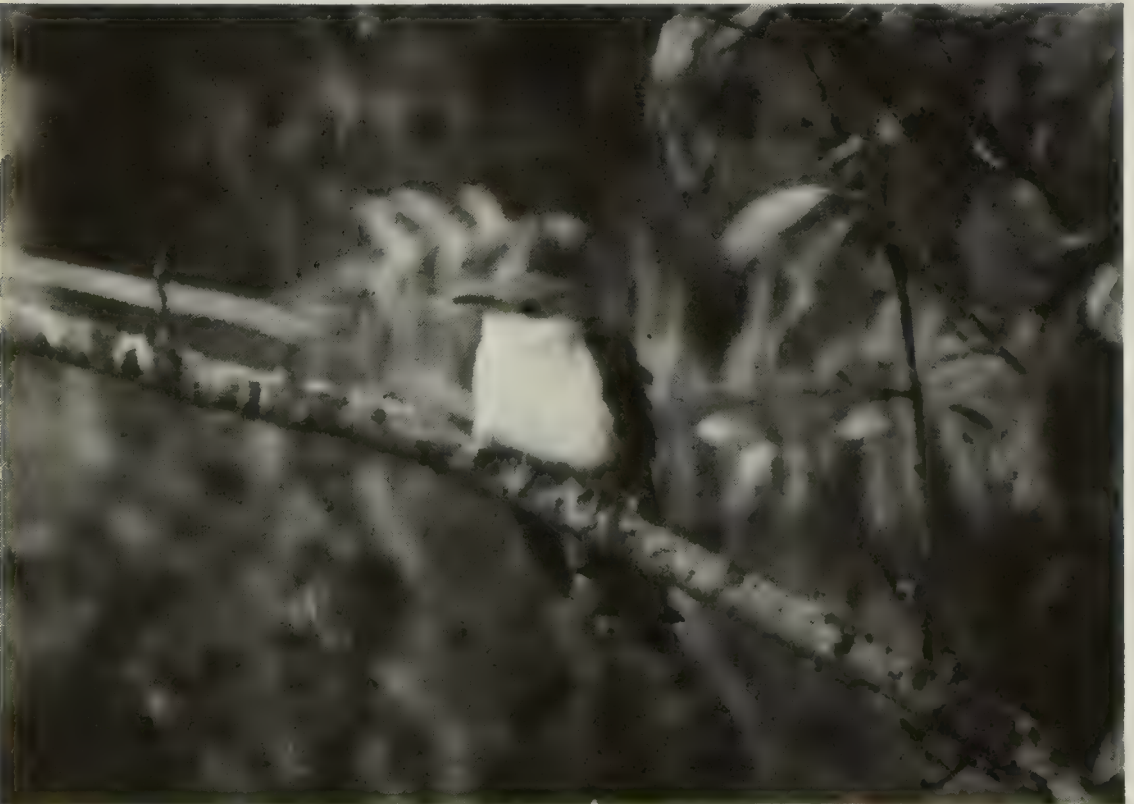
**Orkney** Scapa Bay, dead, 9th January (Dr M. P. Harris, M. Heubeck, I. S. Robertson *et al.*).

(Circumpolar Arctic) There have now been records for ten years running, but 13 out of the 16 in that period have been corpses! Surely it will not be long before one is found over-wintering in a Scottish harbour?

**Black-billed Cuckoo** *Coccyzus erythrophthalmus* (4, 7, 1)

**Scilly** St Mary's, first-winter, 12th October (P. A. Fraser, P. Naylor *et al.*) (plate 276).

(North America) Since 1958, Black-billed Cuckoos have appeared in five years and Yellow-billed Cuckoos *C. americanus* in 13 years; only in 1965 and 1985, however, have both species occurred.



276. First-winter Black-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*, Scilly, October 1985 (David W. Burns)

**Yellow-billed Cuckoo** *Coccyzus americanus* (22, 19, 4)

**Hampshire** Woolston, Southampton, recently dead, 17th October (C. Lloyd, D. Unsworth), now at Cumberland Museum, Southsea.

**Scilly** Two, probably three: St Mary's, 12th to 13th October (M. J. Crosby, D. M. Harris *et*

*al.*); probably another, 17th to 23rd (D. M. Cottridge, C. D. R. Heard *et al.*); Tresco, 13th to 16th (K. D. Durose, L. G. R. Evans, P. Wheeler *et al.*); probably another, 26th to 27th (T. Baker, J. M. Bayldon, R. C. Broadbent *et al.*) (plate 281); St Martin's, 17th, 20th to 22nd (L. G. R. Evans, P. J. Grant, N. J. Watmough *et al.*); St Agnes, 19th; differing individual. 23rd (C. Bradshaw, P. A. Dukes, D. Sykes *et al.*).

(North America) Details of two others, in Cornwall and Surrey, were received too late for inclusion in this report. A remarkable influx, following three blank years. No other year since at least 1958 has produced more than two.

### **Tengmalm's Owl** *Aegolius funereus* (49, 6, 0)

**1981 Durham** Fishburn, dead, leg only (*Brit. Birds* 78: 562), found on 10th January.

(North Eurasia and North America)

### **Needle-tailed Swift** *Hirundapus caudacutus* (2, 3, 1)

**Yorkshire, West** Fairburn Ings, 27th May (J. Glendinning, G. R. Welch *et al.*).

(West Siberia to Japan, south to Northern China; also Himalayas east to Taiwan) With only three records prior to 1983, it is remarkable that this species should subsequently appear in three successive years in late May/early June. Could the same individual be involved?

### **Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus* (0, 6, 0)

**1984 Dyfed** Near Strumble Head, 12th to 13th November (N. A. Lethaby).

**1984 Kent** Warden Point, Sheppey, 14th to 16th November (W. M. Jones, J. Willis *et al.*).

(Mediterranean, North Africa and Middle East) These two, part of a late-autumn influx of southern species, bring the 1984 total to four.

### **Alpine Swift** *Apus melba* (150, 196, 14)

**Cleveland** Kirklevington, 6th April (C. Bielby). Boulby Cliffs, 6th to 7th October (I. Boustead, P. Forster, N. Jackson *et al.*), presumed same as North Yorkshire individual.

**Cornwall** Crantock, 29th August (A. W. G. John).

**Devon** Berry Head, 11th August (N. Ward).

**Dorset** Portland, 26th June (D. Beadle); 28th August (D. Beadle, R. A. Ford, P. P. Jennings *et al.*).

**Dyfed** Caldy Island, 6th July (S. J. Sutcliffe).

**Essex** Colne Point, 10th April (G. Allport, M. O'Brien).

**Humberside** Spurn, 6th July (R. P. Lambe, B. R. Spence).

**Lancashire** St Helen's, 2nd April (A. Bradshaw, D. Owen).

**Lincolnshire** Gibraltar Point, 31st August (P. J. Clurow, M. Kennewell).

**Norfolk** Holme, 8th April (V. Eve *et al.*), Cley, 25th May (M. V. Henty, P. Varney, M. D. Wilson *et al.*).

**Yorkshire, North** Robin Hood's Bay, 5th October (Dr R. & Mrs M. Gulliver), presumed same as Cleveland individual of 6th to 7th.

**Yorkshire, South** Near Barnsley, 22nd August (P. Bradley).

**1976 Cleveland** South Gare, 16th October (I. Boustead *et al.*).

(South Eurasia, Northwest and East Africa) In Ireland, a recently accepted record is from Castlerock, Co. Londonderry, on 8th June 1984. This species has been an annual visitor since at least 1958, but 14 is the most in any year since 1970. Further early-April reports from north Norfolk were received too late for inclusion.

### **Little Swift** *Apus affinis* (0, 5, 1)

**Devon** Slapton Ley area, 15th to 16th August (P. & Mrs B. Williams *et al.*).



(Africa, Middle East and South Asia) There have now been six in all since 1967 and four in the last five years. No obvious pattern is yet emerging: two have appeared in May, one in June, one in August, and two in November. A 1981 record remains under consideration.

**Belted Kingfisher** *Ceryle alcyon* (1, 4, 0)

(North America) None in Britain. A female at Killaloe, Co. Tipperary, from 6th February to 8th March is considered to be the same individual as that at Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare, during October-December 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 564; *Irish Birds* 3: 116).

**Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* (154, 180, 26)

**Cornwall** Porthgwarra, 15, possibly 27, 26th May (H. P. K. Robinson *et al.*).

**Devon** Lundy, 12th May (B. Tollitt). Countess Wear, four, 1st June (R. Khan).

**Gwynedd** Malltraeth, Anglesey, 22nd to 23rd April (Mrs D. Reckie, C. M. Swaine, J. P. Wilkinson).

**Lincolnshire** Gibraltar Point, 26th to 29th August, two, including a juvenile, 28th (R. de Fraine, E. Wood *et al.*).

**Orkney** North Walls, 11th July (J. R. L. Hogarth *et al.*). Sanday, 4th August (A. Olsson). Papa Westray, 9th (D. Boys). Kirkwall, 13th to 15th (E. Bews, V. E. Burgess), probably all same individual.

**Scilly** Bryher, Tresco, St Mary's and occasionally St Agnes, juvenile, 23rd September to at least 1st November (R. C. Bingham, J. Dolan, N. F. Williams *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 79: plate 27).

(South Europe, Southwest Asia and Northwest Africa) Also, one at Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 30th September. A minimum of 26 is the highest total since at least 1958, just beating the previous maximum of 25 in 1983. Given that the same individual was involved in the Orkney sightings, however, only eight records and seven counties (treating Scilly separately) are involved in this total; in 1979, 12 records were spread across 11 counties, but involved only 15 individuals. The Scilly bird, no doubt sustained by the late supply of bees available there, remained later than any since 1963, when one which eventually died was in Cornwall from 10th November to 3rd December (*Brit. Birds* 57: 272).

**Roller** *Coracias garrulus* (135, 75, 1)

**Suffolk** Walberswick, 28th May (B. M. Wentworth).

(South and East Europe, West Asia and Northwest Africa) Unlike the previous species, the Roller remains an elusive visitor. Between one and eight have appeared in all but three years since 1958, with an annual mean of just under three.

**Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha calandra* (0, 2, 1)

**Scilly** St Mary's, 26th to 29th April (W. H. Wagstaff *et al.*).

(Iberia and Morocco east to Southern Russia) The previous two were also in April: at Portland Bill, Dorset, on 2nd April 1961, and at Fair Isle, Shetland, on 28th April 1978. The St Mary's individual followed hot on the heels of a Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*, making Scilly very much the focus of attention at that time.

**White-winged Lark** *Melanocorypha leucoptera* (4, 1, 0)**1981 Norfolk** Near King's Lynn, 22nd to 24th October (Dr J. Lines, J. A. W. Moyes).

(Southern Russia and Central Asia) The first since 1955 and only the fifth in all. Easing of travel restrictions in Soviet Central Asia has enabled European observers to gain first-hand experience of this hitherto little-known species. A paper on its identification, by I. S. Robertson, was published earlier this year (*Brit. Birds* 79: 332-335).

**Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* (40, 240, 14)**Berkshire/Surrey** Wraysbury Reservoir; 29th to 30th April (C. D. R. Heard *et al.*).**Cornwall** Sennen, 24th to 26th September (M. P. Semmens *et al.*). Portreath, 7th November (D. S. Flumm).**Devon** Paignton, 23rd December (M. R. A. & R. E. Bailey, M. Langman) (fig. 5).**Dorset** Portland, 7th to 19th October (D. Beadle *et al.*).**Fife** Isle of May, 8th May (Dr M. P. Harris, J. H. B. Munro, Miss S. Wanless *et al.*).

**Scilly** St Mary's, 16th to 23rd September (Dr P. H. Smith *et al.*); 1st to 4th October (W. Simpson *et al.*) (fig. 6); 8th to 11th October (A. A. Butcher *et al.*); 9th October (K. Osborn *et al.*). Tresco, 9th to 13th October (B. J. Brown *et al.*). Gugh and St Agnes, two, 17th to 19th October (A. R. Dean, P. A. Dukes *et al.*).

**Shetland** Fair Isle, 28th to 29th May (N. J. Riddiford, J. Torino *et al.*); 13th to 14th June (N. J. Riddiford, K. B. Shepherd *et al.*).

**Surrey** See Berkshire/Surrey above.

Fig. 5. Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*, Devon, December 1985 (Michael Langman)

**1982 Shetland** Fair Isle (*Brit. Birds* 76: 504), 16th to 18th September, last seen 20th; 25th to 28th September, last seen 1st October (per N. J. Riddiford).

**1984 Cornwall** Porthgwarra, 24th April (H. P. K. Robinson).

**1984 Scilly** St Martin's, at least 23rd October (N. C. Machin, S. Sully).

**1984 Shetland** Fair Isle, 23rd September to 8th October (*Brit. Birds* 78: 565), correct finders were P. V. Harvey, S. M. Henson, S. A. Webb.

(South Eurasia, North and East Africa) The 1985 records show a clear



north-south divide between spring and autumn, perhaps indicative of birds of southern and eastern origin, respectively (see *Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland*)? The individual at Portland was the first at that much-watched locality. There have now been eight November arrivals since 1958, but the Paignton individual was by far the latest ever (though one remained on Fair Isle, Shetland, from 28th November to at least 6th December 1960: *Brit. Birds* 54: 189).

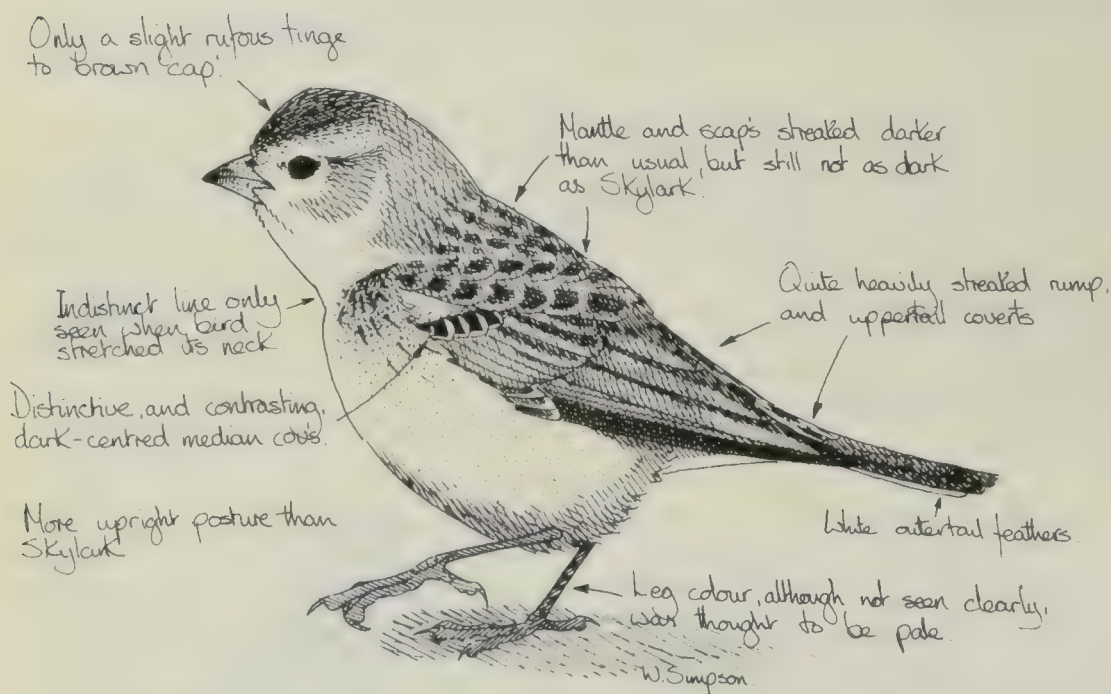


Fig. 6. Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*, Scilly, October 1985 (W. Simpson)

### Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* (7, 84, 3)

**Clwyd** Gronant, 6th September, probably same, 20th (C. Rowley).

**Scilly** St Mary's, 1st May (H. P. K. Robinson).

**Sussex**, West Church Norton, 29th May (J. D. Weston).

**1984 Scilly** Tresco, 15th to 16th October (*Brit. Birds* 78: 565), initial finders were T. A. Gudgeon, N. C. Machin.

(South and East Eurasia, and Africa) Records of this species began to increase significantly in the mid 1960s, associated with a northward expansion of the breeding range. The last five years, however, suggest a reversal of this trend: the quinquennial totals since 1961 are four, 12, 16, 38 and 15 respectively.

### Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae* (135, —, —)

**1977 Orkney** Grice Ness, Stronsay, 26th to 29th September (J. F. Holloway).

**1981 Scilly** St Mary's, 18th to at least 26th October (*Brit. Birds* 75: 514), first seen 15th (B. C. & R. W. Forrester *et al.*).

(West Siberia east to Mongolia and southeast to New Zealand) The 1977 total advances to 99. Post-1982 records of this species are no longer considered by the Committee.



277. First-summer male Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*. Somerset, August 1985 (Barry Wright)

278. Sora *Porzana carolina*. West Sussex, October 1985 (Andrew Moon)







279 & 280. Male Northern Parula *Parula americana*, Scilly, October 1985 (D. M. Cottridge)



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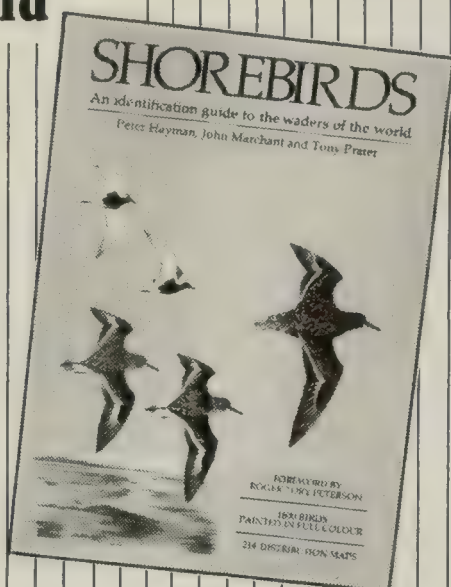
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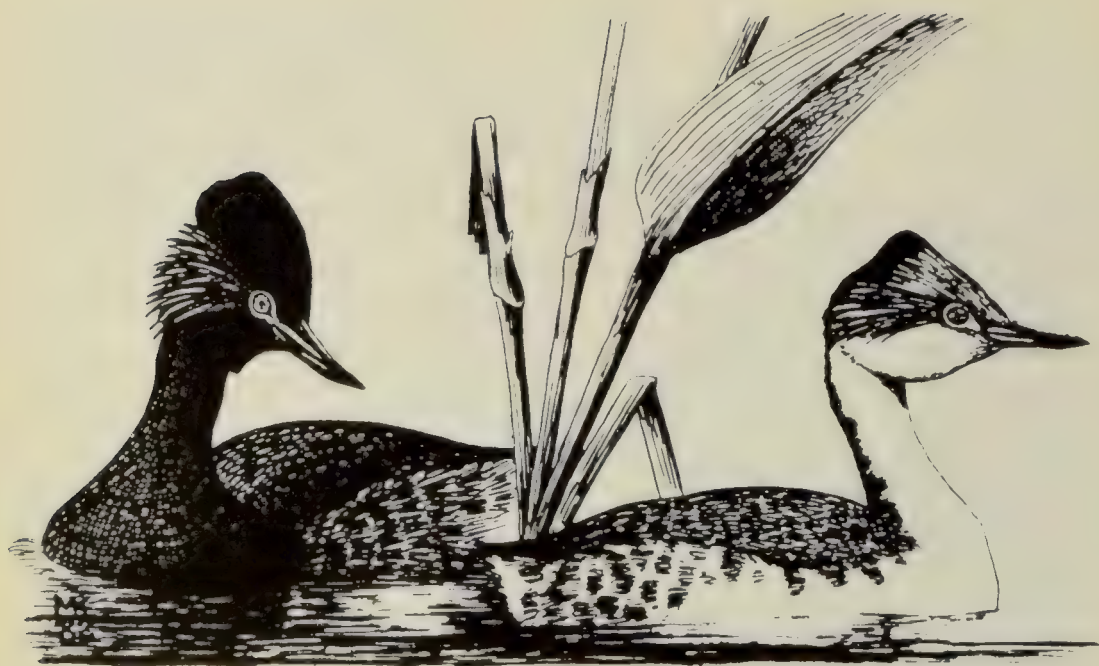
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281. Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus*, Scilly, October 1985 (David W. Burns)

282. Below left, male Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*, Scilly, October 1985 (D. M. Coltridge)

283. Below right, male Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*, Scilly, April 1985 (John Hewitt)







**284.** Above left, first-summer male Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata coronata*, Isle of Man, April 1985 (*David Walker*)

**285.** Above right, Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata*, Scilly, October 1985 (*D. M. Coltridge*)

**286.** Female or immature Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*, Scilly, October 1985 (*Barry Wright*)



**Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* (120, —, —)**1980 Lothian** Aberlady Bay, 19th to 21st July (*Brit. Birds* 74: 482), also 22nd (per A. Brown).**1981 Kent** Dungeness, 30th August (*Brit. Birds* 78: 566), was on 31st (per D. W. Taylor).

(Europe, South Asia and Northwest Africa) Post-1982 records of this species are no longer considered by the Committee.

**Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* (1, 33, 2)**Fife** Isle of May, 22nd to 23rd May, trapped 22nd (J. H. B. Munro, Miss S. Wanless *et al.*).**Scilly** Treco, 14th October (G. Etherington, K. Osborn *et al.*).

(Northeast Russia to Central and East Asia) Only one other has appeared in May: at Portland, Dorset, in 1970. Of the grand total of 36, ten have been in Scilly and 13 on Fair Isle (though, after four in 1984, the latter took a rest in 1985).

**Pechora Pipit** *Anthus gustavi* (13, 12, 3)**Shetland** Fair Isle, three: trapped, 22nd September (D. Beveridge, N. J. Riddiford, P. Smith *et al.*); 24th to 27th (S. M. Henson, Dr D. T. Parkin, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*); 24th to 29th (P. V. Harvey, N. J. Riddiford, D. Suddaby *et al.*) (plate 287).287. Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi*, Shetland, September 1985 (Dennis Coult's)

(Northeast Russia, across Siberia to Bering Strait) The score moves on to: Fair Isle 24, the rest 4. This is the first time since at least 1958 (and possibly ever) that three have been found in one year.

**Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* (30, 142, 11)**Cornwall** Porthgwarra, 27th to 31st October (D. S. Flumm, P. Harrison, W. R. Hirst).**Derbyshire/Yorkshire, South** Rother Valley Country Park, 20th to 23rd May (R. Greasley, D. Hursthouse).**Kent** Dungeness, 15th October (N. R. Davies).**Norfolk** Salthouse, 14th May (S. Harris).**Scilly** Bryher, 18th to 19th April (W. E. Oddie, W. H. Wagstaff *et al.*); St Agnes, 19th May (G. M. & Mrs S. Haig) (fig. 7); St Mary's, 29th September to 2nd October (G. R. Avery, B. Bland, I. Lewington *et al.*); another, 31st (L. R. Cross, C. D. R. Heard *et al.*).**Shetland** Fair Isle, 24th May (C. D. R. Heard, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*); first-summer, 7th to 8th June, trapped 7th (P. V. Harvey, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*); 16th June (P. V. Harvey, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*).



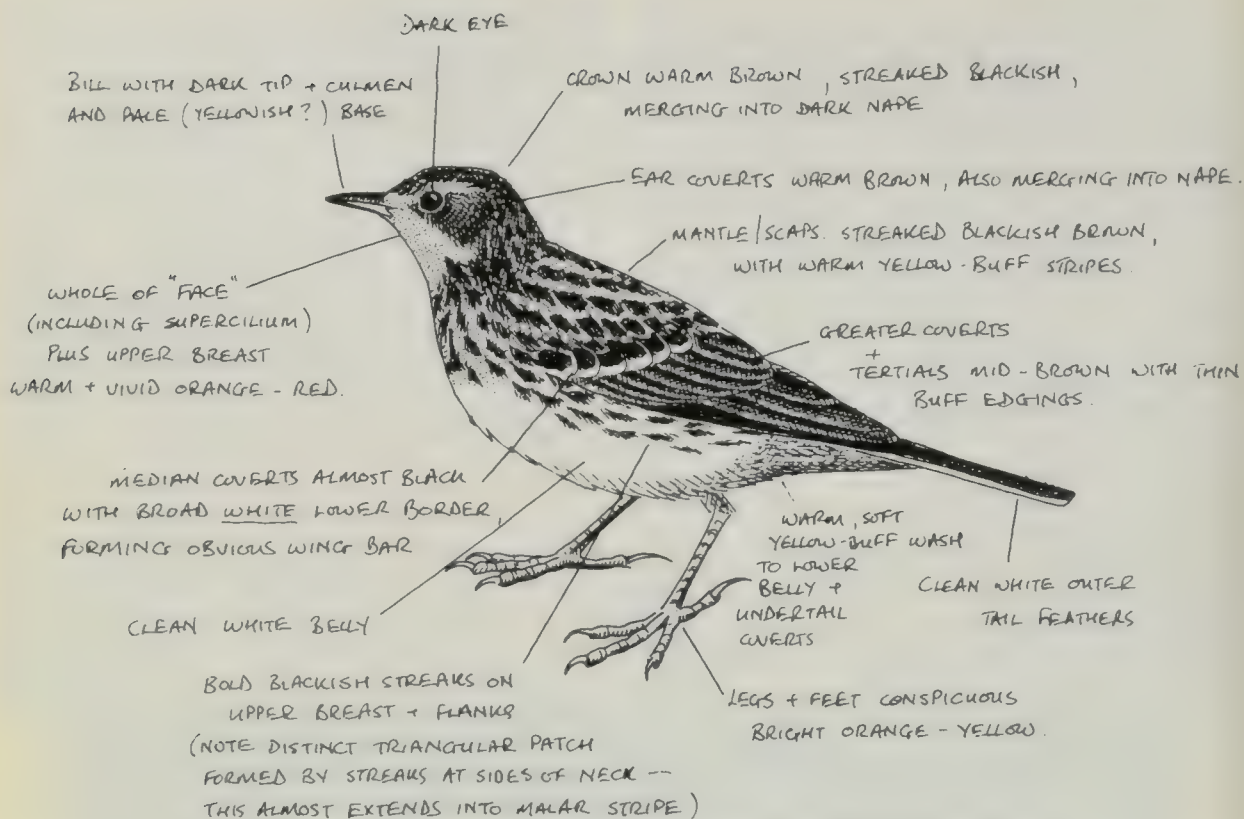


Fig. 7. Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, Scilly, May 1985 (Gavin Haig)

**Tyne & Wear** Barmston Pond, 19th to 22nd May (G. K. Gordon *et al.*).

**Yorkshire, South** See Derbyshire above.

**1984 Scilly** Tresco, 13th to 23rd October (P. J. Grant, M. J. Palmer *et al.*).

(Arctic Eurasia) The total of 11 is a return to the form of the mid 1970s.

### **Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* (3, 11, 0)

**1984 Lothian** Skateraw, ♂, showing characters of the black-headed subspecies *M. f. feldegg*, 28th April (I. J. Andrews).

(Balkans, South Russia and Asia Minor to Afghanistan) Following the paper by van den Berg & Oreel (*Brit. Birds* 78: 176-183), which described a black-headed variant of the grey-headed Yellow Wagtail *M. f. thunbergi*, much stricter criteria have become necessary in evaluating records of black-headed Yellow Wagtails *M. f. feldegg*. The Lothian individual is the only recent observation so far judged acceptable. A number of other records are under consideration, while all previously accepted records are being reviewed.

### **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* (2, 34, 2)

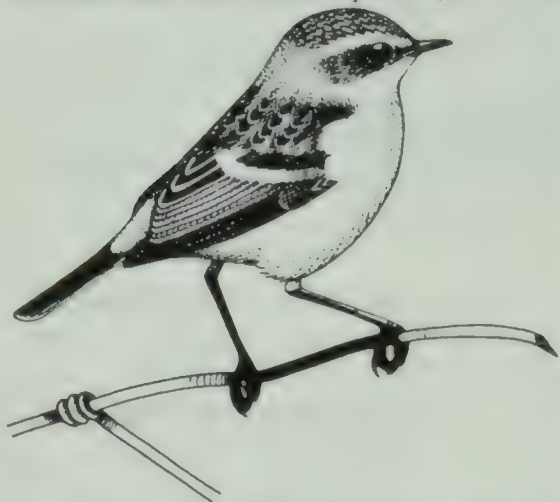
**Lothian** Musselburgh, first-winter, 10th to 12th October (T. Byars, J. Carnduff, P. R. Gordon *et al.*).

**Shetland** Fair Isle, first-winter, 31st August to 2nd September (C. McKay, N. J. Riddiford, K. B. Shepherd *et al.*).

(Northeast and East Russia, West Siberia, and West and Central Asia) Seven or eight have been recorded in each of the five-yearly periods since 1966. There are a number of records still under review, which makes statistical comment difficult; of the grand total of 36, however, 26 have been in Scotland, 19 of them on Fair Isle. The two in 1985 include the first accepted on Fair Isle since 1979, but the third in Lothian since 1981.

**Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia* (2, 58, 5)**Cleveland** Hartlepool, 13th to 15th May (T. Francis, C. Sharpe *et al.*).**Fife** Crail, 15th May (J. G. Steele).**Northumberland** Low Hauxley, first-winter, trapped, 15th May (A. M. Bankier, I. Kerton, B. Little *et al.*).**Shetland** Fair Isle, two: first-summer, 10th to 30th May, trapped 11th (P. V. Harvey, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*); 21st to 23rd (Mr & Mrs McLullen, N. J. Riddiford, K. B. Shepherd *et al.*). Whalsay, first-summer, 15th to 19th May, trapped 15th (Dr C. F. Mackenzie, Dr B. Marshall *et al.*).**1983 Fife** Isle of May, trapped, 16th May (M. Muddiman, Miss S. Wanless).**1984 Fife** Isle of May, 22nd to 24th May, trapped 23rd (Dr M. P. Harris, J. Torino, Miss S. Wanless *et al.*).**1984 Humberside** Spurn, in song, 25th to 26th May (J. Cudworth, S. M. Lister *et al.*), additional to two already published (*Brit. Birds* 78: 571).

(Scandinavia, East Europe and West Asia) Classic spring records in northern Britain. Of the 50 spring occurrences, 47 have been north of a line from the Humber to the Mersey; of 15 autumn records, however, eight have been south of this line.

**Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata* (1, 77, 8)

With the exception of that in Cornwall, individuals showing characters of one or other of the eastern races *S. t. maura* or *stejnegeri*, colloquially known as 'Siberian Stonechats', were recorded as follows:

**Cleveland** Hartlepool, ♂, 13th to 14th May, found dead 15th (M. A. Blick, G. Boyce, T. Francis *et al.*), remains retained by R. T. McAndrew.**Cornwall** Porthgwarra, ♂, showing characters of the east Caucasus and north Iranian race *S. t. variegata*, 1st to 4th October (M. C. Carr, J. Hawkey *et al.*).**Fife** Fife Ness, ♀, 20th May (J. L. S. Cobb).

Fig. 8. Female or immature Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* of one of eastern races *maura*/*stejnegeri*, Shetland, September 1985 (Paul Leonard)

**Humberside** Spurn, first-winter ♂, first seen 8th November 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 571), to 3rd January (per J. Cudworth); ♀, 5th to 10th May, trapped 6th (N. A. Bell, G. Neal, B. R. Spence *et al.*).**Norfolk** Lodge Marsh, Wells, ♀ or immature, 22nd October (J. R. McCallum); same, Wells, 26th (J. C. Eaton, B. Jarvis, P. Milford). Winterton Dunes, ♀ or immature, 9th November (P. R. Allard, J. R. Dawes *et al.*).**Scilly** St Mary's, ♀ or immature, 13th to 18th October (C. D. R. Heard *et al.*).**Shetland** Fair Isle, ♀ or immature, 23rd to 27th September (S. M. Henson, P. Leonard, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*) (fig. 8). Quendale, ♂, 28th to 29th September (A. Fitchett).

(White Sea, eastwards across Siberia; East Caucasus and Northern Iran) Also, a female or immature in the Channel Islands: at Trinity, Jersey, on 17th-18th October. The three in May are of note as there have been only four previously in that month, three of which were in 1978. The Porthgwarra *variegata* was the first of that race to be noted in Britain (but one was trapped in Norway in June 1983: *Brit. Birds* 79: 290).



**Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* (3, 8, 1)**Norfolk** Sheringham, first-winter ♂, 21st to 23rd November (K. B. Shepherd *et al.*).**1983 Norfolk** Sheringham/Weybourne area, ♀, 30th October to 2nd November (*Brit. Birds* 77: 548), also 4th (J. M. Bayldon *et al.*).

(Southeast Europe and South-central Asia) There have now been eight in the past ten years. One of the more remarkable events of 1985 was the appearance of a Pied Wheatear along much the same stretch of Norfolk coast as the 1983 individual.

**Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe hispanica* (15, 21, 1)**Dorset** Portland, ♂, 27th to at least 28th May (R. Lambert, C. Robertson *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 78: plate 192).

(Southern Europe, Northwest Africa and Southwest Asia, also Iran) This wheatear has appeared in only 15 of the years since 1958; thus, it is distinctly less than annual, though there were ten between 1971 and 1975.

**Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti* (11, 12, 0)**Highland** Freswick, Caithness, ♂, first seen 26th December 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 572), to at least 12th January (per G. P. Catley).**1984 Cornwall** (*Brit. Birds* 78: 572), fig. 3 relates to Highland individual.

(North Africa, Northwest Arabia and east to Mongolia)

**White-crowned Black Wheatear** *Oenanthe leucopyga* (0, 1, 0)**1982 Suffolk** Kessingland, ♂, 1st or 2nd to 5th June (*Brit. Birds* 78: 572), principal identifiers were B. J. Brown, R. Conner, A. C. Easton.

(North Africa and Middle East) Full details of this occurrence have been published recently (*Brit. Birds* 79: 221-227).

**Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis* (6, 13, 1)**Devon** Ernesettle, Plymouth, ♂, 3rd May (E. Griffiths).

(Central and Southern Eurasia) Only two have arrived earlier than this. Of the 14 since 1958, five have been in southwest England.

**White's Thrush** *Zoothera dauma* (29, 10, 1)**Shetland** Catfirth, 10th October (C. W. Byers, M. S. Chapman, J. Eames *et al.*).

(Northern and Central Siberia) The first since 1979. Sweden recorded its sixth (and the first since 1966) on 23rd October (*Brit. Birds* 79: 290).

**Siberian Thrush** *Zoothera sibirica* (1, 3, 1)

(Central Siberia east to Japan and south to Tasmania) None in Britain, but Ireland received its first: an immature male on Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 18th October.

**Gray-cheeked Thrush** *Catharus minimus* (1, 17, 2)**Cornwall** Copperhouse Creek, Hayle, 26th to 28th October (S. C. Hutchings, E. & P. Speak, L. P. Williams *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 79: plates 12-13).**Devon** Lundy, first-winter, 11th to 12th October, trapped 11th (B. H. Bailey, R. K. Bircher, M. E. Durham *et al.*).

(North America and Northern Siberia) The Hayle individual was only the fourth on the mainland. Ten of the 12 since 1976 have been in southwest England, whereas the eight earlier records were all between Gwynedd and Shetland.

**Fan-tailed Warbler** *Cisticola juncidis* (0, 3, 1)

(Mediterranean, West and North France, also Africa and South Asia to Australia) The second for Ireland (and fourth for Britain and Ireland combined) occurred at Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 18th April, neatly matching the first in both season and place: Cape Clear Island on 23rd April 1962 (*Brit. Birds* 65: 501-510).

**Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella certhiola* (3, 4, 1)

**Northumberland** Farne Islands, 26th October (N. Gartshore, G. W. J. Hay, K. J. Rideout *et al.*).

(Western Siberia and Central Asia to Japan) All previous records have been between 13th September and 8th October, so this was the latest ever, by a large margin.

**Lanceolated Warbler** *Locustella lanceolata* (9, 26, 1)

**Shetland** Fair Isle, first-winter, trapped, 25th September (P. M. Ellis, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*).

(East Eurasia from Central Russia to North Japan) The classic site (ten of the last 14 years) and a typical date.

**Aquatic Warbler** *Acrocephalus paludicola* (47, —, —)

**1981 Dorset** Lodmoor, first-winter, trapped, 24th August (P. V. Harvey, T. Squire).

(East Europe and Urals) This late acceptance, of a species removed from the list of those considered by the Committee in 1982, brings the 1981 total to 19.

**Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola* (2, 9, 0)

**1984 Cleveland** Hartlepool, first-winter, trapped, 27th October (*Brit. Birds* 78: 574), again 28th (S. M. Henson, P. Naylor *et al.*).

(South Russia and Asia)

**Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* (23, 111, 4)

**Grampian** Girdle Ness, 19th May (D. C. Butcher, C. D. R. Heard, R. A. Schofield).

**Norfolk** Holkham Meads, 15th to 21st June (P. M. Cocker, D. A. Henshilwood *et al.*).

**Scilly** St Agnes, in song, 16th May, found dead 4th June (D. J. Barker, F. H. D. Hicks *et al.*).

**Shetland** Out Skerries, 28th May (W. E. Oddie, E. Tait).

**1984 Essex** Pitsea Marsh, trapped, 28th July (B. J. Manton, P. Osborn, P. J. Shaw).

**1984 Humberside** Saltmarshes Delph, Howden, in song, 19th May to at least 1st June (A. Butler, V. A. Lister, D. Page *et al.*).

(Europe, Southwest and East Asia and North Africa) Four typical (though geographically well-spread) spring records. In the period 1958-72, 14 of 63 individuals (22%) arrived from July onwards, with ten in August (*Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland*). From 1973 to 1985, eight of 52 records (15%) were in autumn; only two were during August, however, and there has been no record in that month since 1977.

**Olivaceous Warbler** *Hippolais pallida* (2, 11, 1)

**Scilly** St Mary's, 17th to 27th October (J. T. Belsey, C. D. R. Heard, R. L. Twigg *et al.*) (plate 288).

(Iberia and Northwest Africa, discontinuously east to Kazakhstan) Two years in succession in Scilly (and, in each case, initial confusion over the





288. Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*, Scilly, October 1985 (D. M. Cottridge)

identification was dispelled by the second-named observer above). A review of all previous records is now underway.

**Booted Warbler** *Hippolais caligata* (1, 20, 1)

**Scilly** St Mary's, 15th to 19th October (R. Gossage *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 79: plates 25-26).

**1982 Yorkshire, North** See 1983 below.

**1983 Yorkshire, North** Scarborough, 11th to 16th October (*Brit. Birds* 78: 576), was in 1982.

**1984 Dorset** St Alban's Head, trapped 23rd October, released 24th (M. J. Cook, M. J. Netherwood, T. Squire *et al.*).

(Northwest Russia, east to Mongolia and south to Iran) The above date correction modifies the opening comment in last year's report. A 1984 claim remains under consideration. There have now been five in Scilly (four since 1980) and six on Fair Isle (but none there since 1977).

**Marmora's Warbler** *Sylvia sarda* (0, 1, 0)

**1982 Yorkshire, South** Midhope Moor, ♂, 15th May to 11th July (*Brit. Birds* 78: 575), still present 24th July (D. Hursthouse, J. Mitchell, S. Stirrup *et al.*).

(Western Mediterranean islands and, locally, coasts)

**Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* (12, 126, 15)

**Cornwall** Porthgwarra, 20th April (S. J. Broyd, R. Filby *et al.*).

**Devon** Lundy, ♂, 3rd June (E. F. Davis).

**Dyfed** Skomer, ♂, 20th April to 8th May (G. Jones, P. Slater *et al.*).

**Fife** Isle of May, ♀, 23rd June to 4th October, trapped 23rd June and in August when in full moult (P. J. Alker, D. A. Bell, P. A. King *et al.*).

**Gwynedd** Bardsey, first-year ♀ showing characters of *S. c. albistriata*, trapped, 17th May (S.

Anderson, T. Collins). Port Meudwy, Aberdaron, ♂, 30th May (A. K. Dolphin).

**Humberside** Spurn, first-summer ♂, 17th to 21st April, trapped 17th (P. Briglin, B. R. Spence *et al.*); ♂, 30th May to 3rd June (S. M. Lister, M. F. Stoyke *et al.*).

**Lancashire** Lytham St Anne's, ♂, 27th to 28th May (M. Jones *et al.*).

**Lincolnshire** Grainthorpe Marsh, ♂, 23rd May (M. Mellor).

**Norfolk** Holkham Meads, ♂, 27th May (D. Carr, J. P. Redwood *et al.*).

**Scilly** St Mary's, ♂, 11th to 16th April (M. Coath, C. D. R. Heard, B. Rabbitts *et al.*).

**Shetland** Fair Isle, possibly ♀, 27th to 28th May (N. J. Riddiford, D. Suddaby, J. Torino *et al.*); first-summer ♂, 22nd July to 2nd August, trapped 22nd July (N. J. & Mrs E. A. Riddiford *et al.*).

**1983 Fife** Fife Ness, ♂, 3rd to 9th May (M. S. Cavanagh *et al.*).

**1984 Cornwall** Near Skewjack, ♂, 4th to 7th May (H. P. K. Robinson *et al.*).

**1984 Scilly** St Mary's, ♀, 22nd April (D. H. Russell, H. Taffs *et al.*).

(South Europe, West Turkey and Northwest Africa) Also, one in Ireland: a male at Old Head of Kinsale, Co. Cork, from 13th to 17th October. The five-yearly totals since 1961 have been five, 20, 18, 33, and 59. The increase in numbers has been accompanied by an increase in the proportion of females: from 18% of those sexed in the period 1958-75, to 27% in the period 1976-85. The female effectively summering on the Isle of May was remarkable. Its stay of 104 days was more than twice as long as that of the male at Sumburgh, Shetland, from 11th August to 30th September 1971. Note that the late acceptances for 1979 and 1980 published in last year's report had, in fact, appeared previously; the statistics have been adjusted accordingly.

**Sardinian Warbler** *Sylvia melanocephala* (1, 11, 1)

**Scilly** St Mary's, ♂, 23rd to 24th October (J. M. Clark *et al.*) (plate 282).

(South Europe, Middle East and North Africa) The third in Scilly, and the sixth in autumn. Of the 13 records, 11 have involved identifiable males.

**Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides* (13, 115, 4)

**Dorset** Hengistbury Head, first-winter, 1st to 3rd October, trapped 2nd (E. C. Brett, P. J. Holmes, D. N. Smith *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 79: plate 24).

**Fife** Lochore, 10th to 12th June (M. J. Feltham, D. Irving). Isle of May, first-winter, 8th to 10th September, trapped 8th (I. M. Darling, D. Stevenson).

**1984 Cornwall** Nanquidno, first-winter, 29th September to 1st October (T. R. Cleaves, A. F. A. Hawkins, C. J. & J. A. Hazell *et al.*).

**1984 Yorkshire, North** Scarborough, 27th August (A. S. Butler, V. A. Lister).

(Eurasia, east from northern Germany) Also, one in Ireland: at Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, from 29th September to 1st October. The 1984 individual at Nanquidno had indications of a second (median-covert) wing-bar, though this was more apparent to some observers than to others. This raised tentative thoughts of Two-barred Greenish Warbler *P. plumbeitarsus*, but other features (including colour of upperparts, colour of underparts, and brief snatches of song) pointed strongly to *P. t. viridanus*.

**Arctic Warbler** *Phylloscopus borealis* (19, 121, 4)

**Cornwall** Cot Valley, St Just, 30th September to 2nd October (K. Alexander, M. C. Carr, S. Rogers *et al.*).

**Devon** Lundy, first-winter, 19th to 23rd September, trapped 19th (J. M. B. King, P. R. Todd *et al.*).

**Lincolnshire** Theddlethorpe Dunes, first-winter, trapped, 10th September (M. Boddy).

**1983 Highland** Wick River, Caithness, 17th September (K. W. Banks *et al.*).



**1984 Cornwall** Nanquidno, 2nd October (T. R. Cleaves, N. & C. Moores, N. G. Morris *et al.*).

**1984 Dorset** Portland, first-winter, trapped, 6th October (*Brit. Birds* 78: 577), was on 6th September.

**1984 Kent** Sandwich Bay, 27th September (D. M. Batchelor).

**1984 Norfolk** Holme, 10th September (P. R. Clarke, C. F. Hibberd).

(Northern Fenno-Scandia east to Alaska) Also, one at Toe Head, Co. Cork, from 20th to 25th October. Other records, from Dorset, Orkney and Shetland, remain under consideration. Prior to 1975, over two-thirds of records came from Scotland. Since then, the proportion has dropped to a little over half, with the remainder on the east coast of England between Norfolk and Northumberland (14), in southwest England (12) and in southwest Ireland (4); the 1984 individual in Kent is the first in southeast England.

### **Pallas's Warbler** *Phylloscopus proregulus* (3, 220, 18)

**Devon** Prawle Point, 21st to 22nd October (B. D. Gibbs, P. M. Mayer).

**Dorset** Portland, 24th October (G. Walbridge). Hengistbury Head, 30th October (B. Small).

**Essex** Mile End, Colchester, 14th November (the late M. J. Bell).

**Greater London** Wandsworth Common, 29th October (A. Greensmith *et al.*).

**Kent** Margate, 13th October (M. J., Mrs P. A. & V. A. R. Lawson, P. Simpson). St Margaret's Bay, trapped, 19th October (J. R. H. Clements); another, 22nd (I. P. Hodgson). Sandwich Bay, 20th to 21st October, two trapped 20th (D. M. Batchelor, K. B. Ellis, R. Smith *et al.*). Dungeness, trapped, 25th October (S. McMinn).

**Norfolk** Blakeney Point, 21st October (E. T. Myers). Holkham Meals, 21st October (S. Abbott, J. B. Kemp); another, 23rd (J. B. Kemp).

**Scilly** St Mary's, 20th October (C. D. R. Heard); two, 20th to 22nd (Dr R. C. Brace *et al.*; B. Bland, R. J. Johns *et al.*); 24th (N. Borrow, P. Vines *et al.*) (fig. 9). Tresco, 22nd to 24th October (Dr R. C. Brace *et al.*); another, 23rd and 25th (A. G. Clarke, S. Rooke).

**Tyne & Wear** Prior's Park, trapped, 25th October (A. Hutt, M. P. Carruthers *et al.*).

**At Sea** Sea area Humber, Inner Dowsing Tower, 53° 20'N 0° 34'E, about 15 km from Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire, 24th October (M. P. Lee).

(Central, East and Southeast Asia) Ireland received its second, third and fourth: at Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, trapped, on 21st October; at Sherkin Island, Co. Cork, during 23rd-27th October; and at Hook Head, Co. Wexford, during 24th-25th October. After two relatively poor years, a resurgence for Britain, and an exceptional year for Ireland.

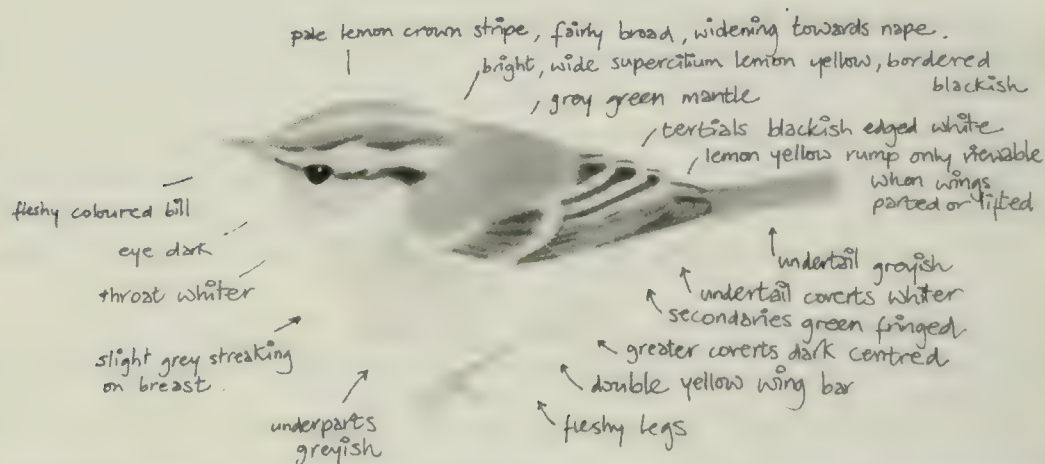


Fig. 9. Pallas's Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*, Scilly, October 1985 (from colour illustration by Nik Borrow)

**Radde's Warbler** *Phylloscopus schwarzi* (1, 45, 4)

**Norfolk** Wells, 22nd to 24th October (P. Burnham, R. Cobbold, J. R. Williamson *et al.*).

**Scilly** Tresco, 19th to 20th October (J. B. Good, C. E. Richards *et al.*). Gugh, 24th to 25th October (T. P. Andrews, L. R. Cross, N. C. Machin *et al.*).

(Central and East Asia) The second for Ireland occurred at Helvick Head, Co. Waterford, on 15th October.

**Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* (1, 43, 3)

**Cleveland** South Gare, 26th October (N. A. Preston *et al.*).

**Fife** Isle of May, first-winter, 20th to 23rd October, trapped 22nd (S. R. D. da Prato *et al.*).

**Scilly** St Mary's, 19th to 20th October (T. A. Guyatt, J. A. Hazell, P. Naylor *et al.*).

(Central and Northeast to Southeast Asia) Between them, Norfolk (10), Scilly (9) and Kent (6) account for over half the grand total.

**Bonelli's Warbler** *Phylloscopus bonelli* (3, 85, 1)

**Cornwall** Sennen, 8th to 22nd September, thought to be nominate race on call (R. Andrew, P. Harrison, V. R. Tucker *et al.*).

**1983 Shetland** Lerwick, 27th September to 3rd October (M. S. Chapman *et al.*).

**1984 Shetland** Fetlar, 19th to 29th September (M. A. Peacock, M. Walker).

(Central, West and South Europe, Levant, and Northwest Africa) Since 1958, there have been 40 in the South Coast counties between Scilly (with 17) and Kent, but the Sennen individual is only the third on the Cornish mainland.

**Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis* (2, 11, 2)

**Suffolk** Lowestoft, first-summer ♂, 13th to 14th May (B. J. Brown, A. & J. C. Eaton *et al.*).

**Yorkshire, North** Filey, ♂, 21st to 22nd May, trapped 21st (P. J. Dunn, A. Lewis *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 78: plate 191).

(Central and Southeast Europe, West Russia and east to Japan) There have now been seven in the last eight years, and another May record, from Norfolk, remains under consideration.

**Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria* (6, 3, 1)

**Wight, Isle of** St Catherine's Point, ♂, 16th May (D. J. Hunnybun, D. B. Wooldridge *et al.*).

(Central-southern Eurasia, discontinuously from the Pyrénées to China) The first since the remarkable Somerset individual which wintered in 1976/77 and 1977/78 (*Brit. Birds* 71: 522). Four others have appeared in spring, one as late as June (in 1938).

**Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus* (0, 11, 0)

**1982 Essex** Ockendon, in June (R. J. Mellis).

**1983 Kent** St Margaret's Bay, 27th October (I. P. Hodgson). Stodmarsh, ♂, at least 22nd November (*Brit. Birds* 78: 579), was on 21st and observer was C. E. V. Saxton.

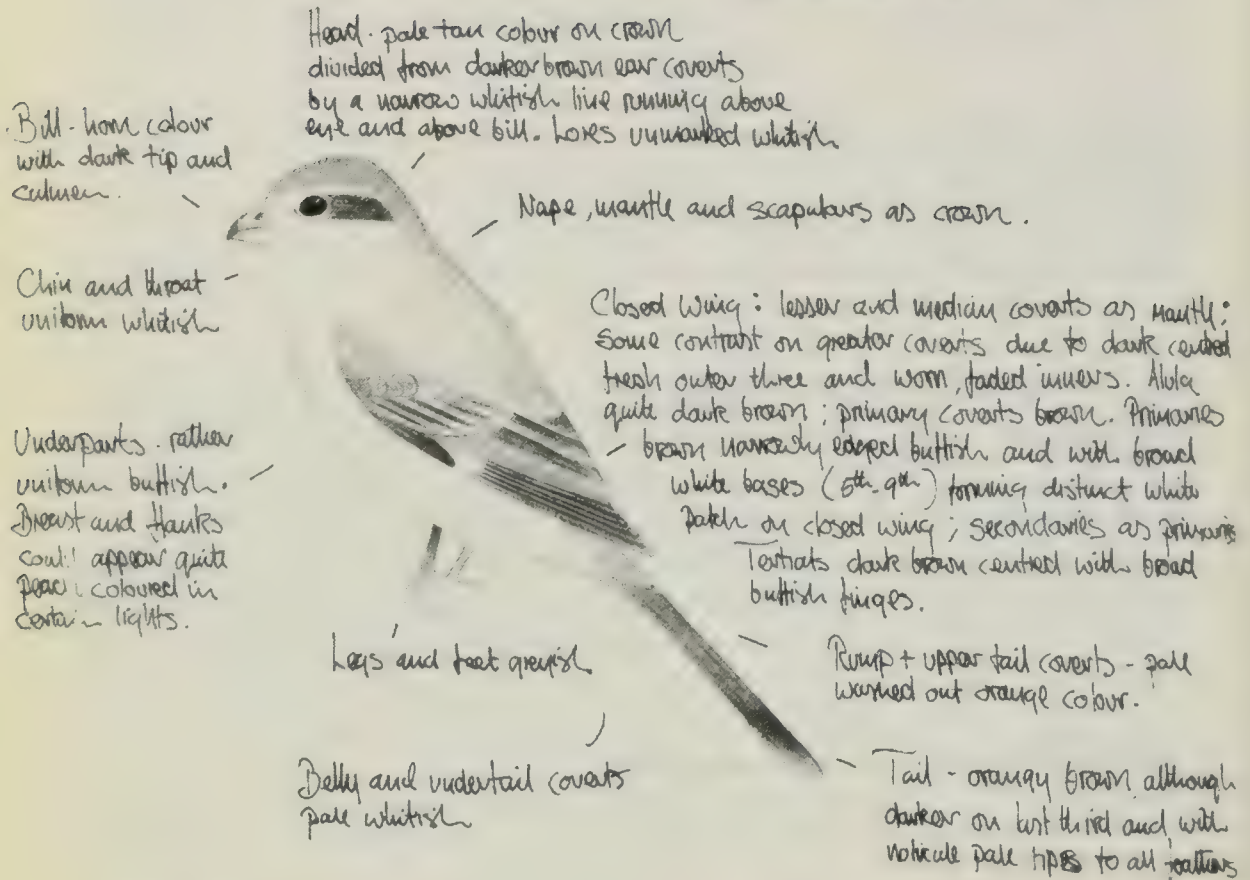
(Scattered from Western Europe east to Manchuria) Confirmation of the Essex individual came from a photograph. Ten appeared in Britain between 1980 and 1983, yet none has arrived in the two subsequent years.

**Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus* (1, 17, 2)

**Dorset** Portland, first-winter, probably ♂, showing characters closest to *phoenicuroides-speculigerus*, 15th to 23rd September, trapped 19th (P. P. Jennings, M. Rogers, G. Walbridge *et al.*) (fig. 10).



In flight orange brown tail and rump immediately obvious, contrasting with uniform pale mantle. White wing bar less very visible at some range.



Structure - Compared with Red Backed Shrike this bird appeared distinctly longer tailed. Tail shape somewhat narrower and well rounded. Bill deeper based than Red Backed. Otherwise generally slimmer overall than Red Backed.

Action - Very active most of the time, taking quite large prey items such as bush crickets. Had a habit of wagging its tail from side to side thus highlighting its length. Typical undulating flight.

Fig. 10. First-winter Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*, Dorset, September 1985 (Dave Beadle)

**Gwynedd** Holyhead, Anglesey, first-winter, 25th October (K. G. Croft).

(South Asia to China) The Holyhead individual is the first for Wales.

### **Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* (101, 366, 7)

**Cornwall** Trevoze Head, ♀ or immature, 9th April (S. M. Christophers).

**Scilly** St Agnes, ♂, 7th to 9th April (E. J. Abraham, F. H. D. Hicks *et al.*); ♂, 25th to 26th (E. & G. Gynn *et al.*). St Mary's, ♂, 18th April to at least 14th May (M. Coath *et al.*).

**Strathclyde** Gartocharn, Dumbartonshire, 7th June (C. N. A. Ellen).

**Wight, Isle of** St Catherine's Point, juvenile, 22nd August (J. C. Gloyn *et al.*).

**1984 Dorset** Portland, first-summer ♂, trapped, 6th June (M. R. Lawn, M. Rogers *et al.*).

**1984 Kent** Kingsgate, juvenile, 6th to 10th October (*Brit. Birds* 78: 580), to 16th (per D. W. Taylor).

(West, Central and South Europe, Southwest Asia and North Africa) In Ireland, one was trapped on Great Saltee, Co. Wexford, during 20th-24th April. The St Agnes individual was the earliest since at least 1956. The stay of 27 days by the St Mary's individual was long for spring, but was equalled by one on the same island in 1979 (*Brit. Birds* 73: 525).

**Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* (45, 354, 2)

**Cambridgeshire** Wandlebury Park, 24th to 26th October (R. G. H. Cant, Dr D. R. C. & Mrs B. Willcox).

**Kent** Northward Hill, 23rd October (A. Parker).

**Suffolk** Westleton, 2nd November to 7th December when found dead (T. D. & Mrs L. H. Charlton, K. Mares, D. Morrell *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 79: plates 54-59).

(Eurasia from Scandinavia and the Alps to Kamchatka and China) The first acceptable records since 1979. Details of another, in Kent, were received too late for inclusion. The Westleton individual became one of the year's big attractions (observers in early December being able to combine it with a visit to the Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* in Norfolk). As it had been feeding avidly on apples, there was great disappointment—and some surprise—when it was eventually found dead in a very emaciated condition (*Brit. Birds* 79: 153). In autumn 1985, thousands were recorded in Fenno-Scandia and 1,500 in Denmark (*Brit. Birds* 79: 291).

**Rose-coloured Starling** *Sturnus roseus* (160, 148, 8)

**Bedfordshire** Henlow, adult, 22nd to at least 24th May (L. G. R. Evans, R. D. Spicer).

**Cornwall** The Lizard, juvenile, 28th to 30th October (B. Cave).

**Hampshire** Southsea, first-summer, 26th March to 24th April (D. T. Paradise, P. M. Potts, Mrs R. Rae *et al.*) (plate 289).

**Scilly** Bryher, juvenile, 6th to 7th and 17th to 31st October (M. S. Garner, J. A. Hazell *et al.*); probably same, St Mary's, 13th and 16th (T. McJannet *et al.*), and St Martin's, 14th (P. Fuller, R. E. Harbird, T. Woodcroft).

**Shetland** Fair Isle, ♂, 31st May to 2nd June (B. O'Dowd, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*).

**Western Isles** North Boisdale, South Uist, first-summer, at least 9th June (P. R. Boyer *et al.*); adult, 21st June to 17th July (T. J. Stowe *et al.*). Balivanich, Benbecula, juvenile, 18th to 20th October (P. R. & Mrs. J. Boyer).

**1983 Devon** Wembury, juvenile, 18th November (D. R. Courtneil).

**1983 Gwynedd** Criccieth, adult, 4th June (D. G. Thomas, H. M. Williams).

**1984 Humberside** Spurn, juvenile, 26th August (J. Cudworth, Mrs. J. Massingham, R. Swales *et al.*).



(Southeast Europe and Southwest Asia) During 1958-70, this species averaged between three and four per year, and one in seven was a juvenile; since 1971, it has averaged between seven and eight per year, and nearly a quarter have been juveniles.

**289.** First summer Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*, Hampshire, April 1985 (Gavin Maclean)



**Red-eyed Vireo** *Vireo olivaceus* (1, 21, 12)

All records relate to first-winter individuals:

**Cornwall** Porthgwarra, 5th to 9th October (P. Aley, S. J. Cox, B. R. Field *et al.*); another, 5th (P. J. Barden, H. Taffs). Cot Valley, St Just, 11th to 12th October (J. G. & S. J. Jones *et al.*).

**Devon** Lundy, trapped, 5th October (R. K. Bircher, N. Odin, I. D. Smith *et al.*) (plates 290-292).



**290-292.** Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*, Devon, October 1985 (N. Odin)

**Gwynedd** Bardsey, trapped, 15th October (S. Anderson, T. Collins, P. J. Donnelly).

**Scilly** St Agnes, 3rd to 11th October (P. A. Dukes *et al.*), St Mary's, 4th to 17th October (B. Bland *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 79: plate 14); another, 7th to 20th (R. H. Chittenden, P. R. Davis, P. Samson *et al.*). Bryher, 18th October (E. D. Lloyd).

(North America) Also, three in Ireland: at Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, during 2nd-7th October (trapped), and 19th-23rd October; and at Brownstown Head, Co. Waterford, on 17th October. The total of 12 in one year eclipses the previous maximum of five in 1981, and is more than half the previous grand total. The maximum influx of an American landbird hitherto was ten Blackpoll Warblers *Dendroica striata* in 1976 (*Brit. Birds* 70: 440). (The Netherlands received their first and second Red-eyed Vireos, and France its second (awaiting ratification), all between 13th and 19th October: *Brit. Birds* 79: 291.)

**Philadelphia Vireo** *Vireo philadelphicus* (0, 0, 1)

(North America) The first for Ireland and the Western Palearctic reached Galley Head, Co. Cork, during 12th-17th October (*Brit. Birds* 79: plates 10 & 11). Chandler S. Robbins included this species in his table of predicted future Nearctic passerine vagrants to Britain or Ireland, but, of 38 species listed, Philadelphia Vireo occupied position 32 (*Brit. Birds* 73: 453).

**Arctic Redpoll** *Carduelis hornemanni* (30, 66, 2)

**Grampian** Rattray Head, 20th January (G. Cresswell, D. Dickson *et al.*).

**Shetland** Laxfirth, ♀, 17th November (P. M. Ellis).

**1984 Northumberland** Low Hauxley, first-year ♂, 3rd to 4th November, trapped 3rd, released 4th (I. Fisher, B. Little, E. R. Meek *et al.*).

(Circumpolar Arctic) Numerous other records, mainly from late 1984 and early 1985, remain under consideration. A large influx was recorded in Scandinavia in 1984/85 (*Brit. Birds* 79: 291). A previously accepted record of two at Duncrue Street Marsh, Co. Antrim, 11th January 1958, has now been rejected by the Northern Ireland Bird Records Committee.

**Two-barred Crossbill** *Loxia leucoptera* (40, 24, 1)

**Central Region** Carron Valley Forest, juvenile to first-winter ♀, 14th October to at least 30th March 1986 (A. P. Barr, P. R. Gordon *et al.*).

(Northwest Europe, North-central Asia, northern North America and West Indies) Hundreds reached Scandinavia in autumn 1985 (*Brit. Birds* 79: 291). A number of past records dating back to 1979 are still under investigation, amongst them the 1984 New Forest individual (further detailed reports of which would be welcomed, whether or not in favour of identification as *leucoptera*).

**Parrot Crossbill** *Loxia pytyopsittacus* (10, 231, 9)

**Norfolk** Wells, pair, presumably same as or related to 1983-84 individuals (*Brit. Birds* 78: 581), returned 19th February; reared broods of four and two respectively, but seen Holkham in June with only five juveniles (J. B. Kemp *et al.* per G. E. Dunmore). Cley, ♂ and four juveniles, 17th to 18th July (R. Aberdeen, S. J. M. Gantlett *et al.*), presumed same as Wells/Holkham family.

**Orkney** Holm, Mainland, ♂, dead, 27th October (R. G. & S. R. Adam, C. J. Booth), skull retained by C. J. Booth.

**Suffolk** Locality withheld, pair and two juveniles, at least 4th to 21st April; ♂ to at least 12th May; probably bred; presumably same as or related to 1984 individuals (*Brit. Birds* 78: 581) (T. D. Charlton, F. K. Cobb, G. J. Jobson *et al.*).

**1975 Lothian** Gladhouse, at least seven, 26th October to 3rd January 1976, some to 27th (A. Brown, R. Smith, Dr L. L. J. Vick).

**1976 Lothian** See 1975 Lothian above.

**1982 Durham** See 1983 Durham below.

**1983 Durham** Hamsterley Forest, ♂, 2nd January (*Brit. Birds* 77: 557), first seen 23rd December 1982 (Dr J. D. & R. D. Thomas *et al.*).

**1983 Tyne & Wear** Barmston, ♀, 24th March, previously rejected (*Brit. Birds* 77: 561), now accepted on photographic evidence (B. Moore).

**1984 Suffolk** Locality withheld, up to seven, 29th April to late summer (*Brit. Birds* 78: 581), two ♂♂ first seen 20th February (J. M. Cawston).

(Northern Europe, from Norway east to Russia and south to Estonia) For 1985, only the Orkney individual and the eight East Anglian juveniles have



been counted as new in the statistics. A record of about 20 at Cushendall, Co. Antrim, on 11th April 1963, which was previously accepted in Ireland (though apparently not included in our statistics), has now been rejected by the Northern Ireland Bird Records Committee.

**Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes githagineus* (0, 4, 1)

**Essex** Foulness, 21st September (G. Wright).

**1984 Sussex, West** Church Norton, 18th to 23rd May (*Brit. Birds* 78: 581; 79: 299-300), first date was 19th and third named observer was P. James.

(Southeast Spain, Canary Islands, Northern Africa, and Southwest Asia) The previous four (between 1971 and 1984) were all in spring.

**Black-and-white Warbler** *Mniotilta varia* (1, 8, 1)

**Norfolk** How Hill, Ludham, 3rd to 15th December (M. I. Eldridge, M. McDonnell *et al.*).

(North America) Geographically and seasonally a remarkable record, though the species has now occurred four years in succession. How Hill is a relatively small nature reserve and the locals coped admirably with the unaccustomed influx of observers (*Brit. Birds* 79: 153).

**Northern Parula** *Parula americana* (0, 6, 3)

**Cornwall** Penlee Point, Cawsand, first-winter ♀, 17th to 19th October (R. W. Gould, S. C. Madge, R. Smaldon *et al.*).

**Dorset** Hengistbury Head, first-winter ♀, 30th September to 12th October, trapped 9th (D. N. Smith *et al.*).

**Scilly** St Mary's, ♂, 3rd to 17th October (E. C. Basterfield *et al.*); presumed same, St Agnes, 18th to 21st (R. Andrew *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 79: plates 15-18, 279 & 280).

(North America) Cornwall, Dorset and Scilly have all enjoyed this species previously (with Co. Cork the only other county so privileged). The Hengistbury Head individual is the first to arrive in September.

**Yellow-rumped Warbler** *Dendroica coronata* (1, 10, 4)

Individuals showing the characters of the northern and eastern race *D. c. coronata*, formerly known as Myrtle Warbler, were identified as follows:

**Man, Isle of** Calf of Man, first-summer ♂, trapped, 30th May (P. Howlett, D. Walker) (plate 284).

**Scilly** St Mary's, 7th to 22nd October (N. W. Addey, P. A. Jeffery, G. H. Johnson *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 79: plates 21-22, 285); another, 10th October (A. P. Benson, C. Todd).

(North America) One was trapped on Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, during 5th-7th October. There is one previous record for May: on Fair Isle, Shetland, in 1977 (*Brit. Birds* 71: 526).

**Blackpoll Warbler** *Dendroica striata* (0, 22, 2)

**Shetland** Whalsay, first-winter, 30th September to 3rd October, trapped 30th (J. L. Irvine, Dr B. Marshall *et al.*).

**1984 Scilly** St Mary's, first-winter, 25th October to 4th November (H. P. K. Robinson *et al.*).

(North America) Also, one trapped in Ireland, at Hook Head, Co. Wexford, during 5th-15th October. The Whalsay individual was the first in Scotland and only the third away from southwest Britain and Ireland (there have been two on Bardsey Island, Gwynedd; and one also reached the Channel Islands in 1980).

**American Redstart** *Setophaga ruticilla* (0, 5, 1)

**1983 Cornwall** St Just, first-winter ♂, 13th to 24th October (*Brit. Birds* 77: 558), finder was P. A. Maker.

(North America) None in Britain in 1985, but Ireland received its second, at Galley Head, Co. Cork, during 13th-15th October (*Brit. Birds* 79: plates 8 & 9). This species has previously appeared in Co. Cork, in Lincolnshire, in Strathclyde, and twice on the Cornish mainland, but, surprisingly, it has never reached Scilly (that hint should do the trick for 1986!).

**Ovenbird** *Seiurus aurocapillus* (0, 2, 1)

**Devon** Wembury, probably first-winter, freshly dead, 22nd October; skin retained by K. E. Partridge (K. E. Partridge, N. Ward, F. Williams).

(North America) This was the third, but only one (Out Skerries, Shetland, in 1973) has been seen alive (see also *Brit. Birds* 63: 289).

**Scarlet Tanager** *Piranga olivacea* (0, 4, 1)

(North America) None in Britain. In Ireland, an adult male was at Firkeel, Co. Cork, on 18th October. This is the first accepted in Ireland, but there are two earlier in October still awaiting ratification.

**White-throated Sparrow** *Zonotrichia albicollis* (1, 13, 0)

(North America) No arrivals in Britain or Ireland, but the bird at Duncrue Street, Belfast, Co. Antrim, in late 1984 remained until at least 7th April 1985 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 583).

**Pine Bunting** *Emberiza leucocephalos* (2, 5, 2)

**Scilly** St Mary's, ♂, 19th to 23rd April (B. Rabbitts *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 78: plate 170; 79: plate 283).

**Yorkshire, North** Knaresborough, ♂, 6th April (P. T. Treloar).

(Urals, across Asia to Sakhalin) There is one previous April occurrence: at Portland, Dorset, in 1975 (*Brit. Birds* 71: 314-315). The others were in January, August, October (3) and November. Two past claims, from Norfolk and Scilly, remain under consideration.

**Rustic Bunting** *Emberiza rustica* (34, 135, 12)

**Humberside** Spurn, ♀, 12th to 15th May, trapped 13th (P. Smith, B. R. Spence *et al.*) (plate 293).

**Man, Isle of** Calf of Man, first-summer ♂, trapped, 17th May (P. Howlett, D. Walker).

**Norfolk** Salthouse, ♂, 16th May (S. & Mrs E. Harris, D. Moore *et al.*).

**Scilly** St Mary's, 13th to 18th October (P. I. Holt, N. C. Moores *et al.*); presumed same, 19th (A. K. Bose, P. L. Hines). St Martin's, 16th to 17th October (W. T. Appleyard, J. G. Hole, R. D. Murray *et al.*).

**Shetland** Fair Isle, ♂, 7th May (N. J. & Mrs E. A. Riddiford *et al.*); ♂, 22nd June (D. R. Bird, K. B. Shepherd); sex/age indeterminate, 27th September (J. C. Eames, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*); first-winter ♂, 7th to 17th October, trapped 8th (P. V. Harvey, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*). Whalsay, ♂, 13th May (Drs C. Mackenzie, B. Marshall). Virkie, ♀, 21st May (A. G. & Dr J. N. Darroch, P. M. Ellis).

(Northeast Europe across to North Asia) Ireland received its second: at Loop Head, Co. Cork, trapped, on 13th October. The total of 12 is the most since 15 in 1975. A further spring record remains under consideration, while details of one on St Agnes, Scilly, in mid October have yet to be submitted.





293. Female Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*, Humberside, May 1985 (B. R. Spence)

**Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* (94, 252, 20)

**Devon** Lundy, 2nd November (C. Cope, D. Hobson, A. M. Taylor).

**Hertfordshire** Rye Meads, trapped, 3rd May (A. Harris, T. Spall *et al.*) (plates 294 & 295).

**Northumberland** Inner Farne, 26th October (G. Hay, M. Tyers *et al.*).

**Orkney** Torness, South Ronaldsay, 24th September (M. Gray). Holm, Mainland, 29th to 30th September (M. Gray, E. R. Meek).

**Scilly** Tresco, 17th October (A. D. J. Cook, P. I. Holt, C. A. Moores). St Mary's, 19th to 30th October (C. D. R. Heard, J. Miller, A. Noeske *et al.*).

**Shetland** Fair Isle, at least ten: 15th to 16th May (T. Lumsden, N. J. Riddiford, K. B. Shepherd *et al.*); 20th to 22nd (D. R. Bird, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*); 9th September (R. J. Frith, S. J. Hayhow, S. H. Holliday *et al.*); 12th (P. V. Harvey *et al.*); 28th to 29th (P. V. Harvey *et al.*); 7th to 10th October (D. J. Weaver *et al.*); another, 7th to 10th (K. B. Shepherd *et al.*); 13th to 15th; another, 17th to 18th; another, 26th (P. V. Harvey, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*). Out Skerries, 23rd to 26th September (D. M. Pullan).

**Strathclyde** Skerryvore Lighthouse, South Minch, first-winter, dead, about 27th September (A. McConnell per B. Zonfrillo).

**Yorkshire, North** Knaresborough, ♂, trapped, 22nd April (J. R. Mather, P. T. Treloar, Dr J. Watkins).

**1983 Merseyside** Heswall, 23rd January to 2nd April, trapped 23rd January (*Brit. Birds* 77: 559), was ♂; still present 4th, when in song (G. P. Catley, M. Mellor).

**1983 Scilly** St Agnes, 5th May (B. Reed, S. M. Whitehouse).

**1984 Cornwall** Sennen, 14th to 19th April (H. P. K. Robinson *et al.*).

**1984 Humberside** Spurn, 17th to 18th November (N. A. Bell *et al.*).

**1984 Scilly** St Mary's, 14th to 18th October (*Brit. Birds* 78: 584), finders/identifiers should have included A. V. Moon.

**1984 Shetland** Scatness, 20th October (Dr B. Marshall). Fair Isle (*Brit. Birds* 78: 584): two, 22nd September, finders were S. M. Henson, J. A. Hopper; 22nd September to 1st October, finders included S. M. Henson, J. A. Hopper; 23rd to 24th September, finders were S. M. Henson, J. A. Hopper, W. Simpson.

(Northeast Europe and North Asia) Another good showing in 1985, and the 1984 total advances to a staggering 41. With 13 records already accepted (and two others from Fair Isle among several still under

consideration), the Northern Isles were again well represented, but southwest England produced only three (cf. *Brit. Birds* 78: 584-585). One previously accepted in Ireland has now been rejected by the Northern Ireland Bird Records Committee: at Belfast Lough, Co. Antrim, on 25th September 1955.



294 & 295. Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*, Hertfordshire, May 1985 (Alan Harris)

**Yellow-breasted Bunting** *Emberiza aureola* (10, 110, 3)

**Shetland** Fair Isle, ♀ or immature, 13th to 17th September (S. J. Aspinall, P. V. Harvey *et al.*); another, 13th to 17th (S. J. Aspinall, K. B. Shepherd *et al.*).

(Northeast Europe across North Asia) The poorest showing since 1975. Not since 1971 have British records been confined to Fair Isle; Ireland, however, recorded its fourth in 1985: a female or immature at Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 18th September.

**Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* (9, 52, 2)

**Cornwall** Portcothan, ♂, 7th to 11th October (S. M. Christophers, A. Hathway, B. Wotton).

**Shetland** Fair Isle, ♂, 4th to 14th August (D. R. Bird, N. J. Riddiford *et al.*).

(Southeast Europe and Southwest Asia) Debate about the provenance of Black-headed Buntings continues unabated. Full supporting descriptions are still required for the Cley, Norfolk, individual of October 1984.

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak** *Pheucticus ludovicianus* (0, 14, 3)

**Devon** Lundy, first-winter ♂, trapped, 27th October (A. M. Taylor *et al.*).

**Scilly** St Mary's, first-winter ♂, 9th to 28th October (J. H. Marchant, A. J. Prater *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 79: plates 19 & 296).

(North America) In Ireland, a first-winter female which was found injured near Kilmore, Co. Wexford, on 3rd October died on 7th. The record of an adult male at Shane's Castle, Co. Antrim, on 24th November 1957—previously accepted as the first for Britain and Ireland (*Brit. Birds* 53: 149-152)—has now been rejected by the Northern Ireland Bird Records Committee. (France recorded its first Rose-breasted Grosbeak—subject to





296. First-winter male Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*, Scilly, October 1985 (D. M. Coltridge)

ratification—in 1985: at Ouessant, during 15th-22nd October. Almost predictably, it was a first-winter male.)

**Bobolink** *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* (0, 11, 1)

**Scilly** St Mary's, ♀ or immature, 9th to 21st October (P. Aley, S. J. Cox, J. Talbot *et al.*) (plate 286).

(North America) This species has now appeared five years in succession, and has reached Scilly in eight years since 1962.

Including the Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea* noted in Appendix I, the number of American landbirds which reached Britain and Ireland in 1985 was at least 38 individuals of 15 species (there is a minimum of four individuals of two of these species still under consideration by the various records committees, while the file on the Wilson's Warbler *Wilsonia pusilla* at Rame Head, Devon—potentially a new species for the Western Palearctic—is now with the BOU Records Committee). Thus, the autumn of 1985 was by far the best yet for the total number of American landbirds (see *Brit. Birds* 78: 586), and seems destined to equal the record 16 species of 1983. It is also notable that nine individuals of six species (and probably 12 individuals of seven species) reached the British mainland, with one pending Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* as far east as Surrey and the Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* in Norfolk (though it is difficult to speculate where that first made landfall). Several American landbirds also reached the Netherlands and France. Species with a predominantly northern distribution in North America (for example, Gray-checked

Thrush *Catharus minimus* and Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata* were accompanied by species with a predominantly southern distribution (for example, Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea*). All in all, a remarkable influx, which would no doubt repay a meteorological analysis.

## Appendix 1. Category D species accepted (see *Brit. Birds* 64: 429)

**White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* (not known, 12, 0)

**1975 Suffolk** Minsmere, adult, 2nd May (J. R. Hopkins).

(Southeast Europe, West and Southwest Asia and Africa) In 1975, there were also adults (perhaps the same individual) in Essex, Humberside and Kent in July (*Brit. Birds* 70: 443) and in Dorset in September (*Brit. Birds* 76: 527).

**Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius* (0, 2, 1)

**Strathclyde** Skerryvore Lighthouse, South Minch, 4th to 7th June, found dead 8th (A. McConnell), skin now at BTO, Tring.

(Southern Europe, Southern Asia and Northwest Africa) The two previous records were on North Ronaldsay, Orkney, during 29th August to 6th September 1966, and at Rye, East Sussex, on 10th August 1977. The categorisation of Blue Rock Thrush is now being reconsidered by the BOU Records Committee.

**Indigo Bunting** *Passerina cyanea* (0, 2, 1)

(North America) One was trapped on Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, during 9th-19th October. The first in Ireland, following others on Fair Isle, Shetland, in August 1964 and in Essex in September 1973 (*Brit. Birds* 73: 531). Surely the credentials of the Cape Clear Island individual—which was an immature into the bargain—could scarcely be better?

**Painted Bunting** *Passerina ciris* (0, 6, 0)

**1979 Shetland** Fair Isle, ♂, 19th to 22nd June (*Brit. Birds* 73: 531), also 1st July (per N. J. Riddiford).

(North and Central America)

## Appendix 2. List of records not accepted 1985

**White-billed Diver** Benbecula, Western Isles, 28th September. **Little Shearwater** Strumble Head, Dyfed, 1st August; 3rd September; Turnberry Point, Strathclyde, 4th August; St Agnes Head, Cornwall, 3rd September; Hilbre, Merseyside, 21st September. **Magnificent Frigatebird** Exe Estuary, Devon, 15th November. **Frigatebird** Between Sumburgh and Fair Isle, Shetland, 28th May. **Little Bittern** Brown Moss, Shropshire, 22nd December. **Lesser White-fronted Goose** Tottenhill Gravel-pits, Norfolk, 15th December. **Green-winged Teal** Beaulieu Firth, Highland, 25th January to at least 3rd March. **Ring-necked Duck** Colemere, Shropshire, 4th May. **Surf Scoter** Blackhall Rocks, Durham, 18th January. **Black Kite** Dyfi Forest, Gwynedd, 26th April; Prawle Point, Devon, 27th April; near Neath, West Glamorgan, 11th May; Haverton Hill, Cleveland, 6th July; Dorman's Pool, Cleveland, 1st August; River Otter, Devon, 24th October. **American Kestrel** Cheddar Gorge, Somerset, late November.



**Red-footed Falcon** Saltfleetby/Theddlethorpe, Lincolnshire, 25th May; Hankerton, Wiltshire, 24th September; Sway, Hampshire, 1st December. **Gyrfalcon** Heysham, Lancashire, 13th March; Hesketh Marsh, Lancashire, 3rd May; between Kinlochewe and Incheril, Highland, 19th May; between Morecambe and Hest Bank, Lancashire, 23rd November. **Little Crane** Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, 20th March; Spurn, Humberside, 30th October. **Crane** Stocker's Lake, Hertfordshire, 13th May. **Black-winged Stilt** Near Stevenage, Hertfordshire, 12th September. **Pratincole** Killearn, Central Region, 4th August; West Croydon, Greater London, 9th September. **Sociable Plover** Bromborough, Merseyside, 26th October. **Western Sandpiper** Rhosneigr, Anglesey, Gwynedd, 29th June. **Baird's Sandpiper** Breydon Water, Norfolk, 8th to 9th May, two, 9th. **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** Papa Westray, Orkney, 21st September. **Great Snipe** Ashurst, Hampshire, 20th January; Tilney All Saints, Norfolk, 20th February; Loch Lyon, Tayside, 5th June. **Dowitcher** Red Rocks, Merseyside, 29th September. **Greater Yellowlegs** Keyhaven Marsh, Hampshire, two, 31st March. **Lesser Yellowlegs** Langness, Isle of Man, 20th August. **Wilson's Phalarope** Aldenham Reservoir, Hertfordshire, 19th January; Guardbridge, Fife, 16th November. **Laughing Gull** Rossall Point, Lancashire, 9th March; Hayle, Cornwall, 26th July; Landguard, Suffolk, 30th December. **Slender-billed Gull** Seaforth Dock Pools, Merseyside, 24th to 26th February; Hardwick, Hereford & Worcester, 22nd December. **Ring-billed Gull** Aberystwyth, Dyfed, 12th January; River Itchen, Hampshire, 14th January; Chelmarsh Lake, Shropshire, 16th to 21st January and 16th February; Hoy, Orkney, 17th January; Titchfield Haven, Hampshire, 19th January; St Mary's, Scilly, 1st February; Abberton Reservoir, Essex, 3rd to 10th February; Gwithian, Cornwall, 17th February; Chew Valley Lake, Avon, 17th February; Aberystwyth, Dyfed, 19th February; Lerwick, Shetland, 19th February; Beesands Ley, Devon, 20th February; South Muskam, Nottinghamshire, 24th February; near Shoeburyness, Essex, 25th February; Broadwater, Gwynedd, 25th February; Frodsham, Cheshire, 7th April; Taff/Ely Estuary, South Glamorgan, 25th May and 4th June; St Mary's, Scilly, 1st June; Snettisham, Norfolk, 9th June; Blakeney Marsh, Norfolk, 9th September; Anstruther, Fife, 20th September; Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire, 28th September; Elvaston, Derbyshire, 20th October; Bornish, South Uist, Western Isles, 3rd November; Hanningfield Reservoir, Essex, 30th December. **Gull-billed Tern** Barn's Ness, Lothian, 15th August; Great Orme, Gwynedd, 26th August; Penmaenmawr, Gwynedd, 14th September. **Lesser Crested Tern** Seaton Snook, Cleveland, 2nd August. **Sooty Tern** Off Teignmouth, Devon, two, 3rd June; Hunstanton, Norfolk, 5th September. **White-winged Black Tern** Rockcliffe Marsh, Cumbria, 29th May; Cemlyn Bay, Anglesey, Gwynedd, 17th August; Ely, Cambridgeshire, 30th August. **Alpine Swift** Barnsley, South Yorkshire, 3rd April; Alloa, Fife, 28th May. **Short-toed Lark** Spurn, Humberside, 28th May; Tresco, Scilly, second individual, 13th October. **Crested Lark** Orpington, Kent, 16th to 17th January; Dawlish Warren, Devon, 13th May. **Crag Martin** Radipole, Dorset, 23rd June; Hornchurch, Essex, 7th July. **Olive-backed Pipit** near Hilbre, Merseyside, 2nd November. **Pechora Pipit** near Burley, Hampshire, 11th February. **Red-throated Pipit** Seaford Head, East Sussex, 24th March; Salthouse, Norfolk, 8th April; Nene River Outfall, Lincolnshire, 7th October. **Citrine Wagtail** Barling Hall, Essex, 1st January. **Siberian Stonechat** Dunwich Common, Suffolk, 2nd March. **Isabelline Wheatear** Red Rocks, Argyll, Strathclyde, 27th May. **Desert Wheatear** Porthgwarra, Cornwall, 19th October. **Hume's Wheatear** Gugh, Scilly, 8th April. **Eye-browed Thrush** Near St Austell, Cornwall, 17th November. **Dusky Thrush** Aberfeldy, Tayside, 29th January. **Lanceolated Warbler** Blakeney Point, Norfolk, 28th September. **Moustached Warbler** Blakeney Point, Norfolk, 23rd May. **Arctic Warbler** Widewall, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, 24th September; St Mary's, Scilly, 25th September; Hengistbury Head, Dorset, 30th September. **Pallas's Warbler** St Mary's, Scilly, 25th October; Wraysbury Gravel-pits, Berkshire, 7th November. **Radde's Warbler** Fife Ness, Fife, 23rd May. **Dusky Warbler** Saltfleetby/Theddlethorpe, Lincolnshire, 21st October; Inner Farne, Northumberland, 23rd October. **Bonelli's Warbler** St Ives, Cornwall, 8th to 10th August; Belfairs Nature Reserve, Essex, 3rd September; Fife Ness, Fife, 23rd September. **Collared Flycatcher** Fishbourne, West Sussex, 4th May. **Wallcreeper** Sidmouth, Devon, 29th December. **Penduline Tit** Titchwell, Norfolk, 26th October. **Isabelline Shrike** Thorpeness, Suffolk, 10th to 11th October. **Nutcracker** Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, 13th January; Whitstable, Kent, 15th June; near Langham, Essex, 25th November. **Arctic Redpoll** Leverton Marsh, Lincolnshire, 1st December; Munlochy Bay, Highland, 15th December.

**Two-barred Crossbill** Bridlestones, Dally Forest, North Yorkshire, 15th January; Grinkle Park, Cleveland, 16th to 17th June; Rostherne Mere, Cheshire, three, 27th October.

## 1984

**Pied-billed Grebe** River Otter, Devon, 4th December. **Night Heron** Between Lechlade and Inglesham, Wiltshire, 15th July. **Blue-winged Teal** Great Totham, Colman's Reservoir, Abberton Reservoir, Essex, various dates, 29th April to 22nd August. **King Eider** North of Fetlar, Shetland, 20th January. **Surf Scoter** St Ives, Cornwall, 6th November. **Black Kite** Great Totham, Essex, 4th June. **Gyr Falcon** Stranraer, Dumfries & Galloway, 23rd December. **Little Bustard** Weybourne, Norfolk, 18th November. **Lesser Golden Plover** Chew Valley Lake, Avon, 17th October. **Western Sandpiper** Cheddar Reservoir, Somerset, 23rd September. **Least Sandpiper** Grutness, Shetland, 21st September. **White-rumped Sandpiper** Ferrybridge, Dorset, 10th November. **Baird's Sandpiper** Cuckmere Haven, East Sussex, 11th October. **Broad-billed Sandpiper** Burgh Marsh, Cumbria, 18th September. **Marsh Sandpiper** Cuerdley Marsh, Cheshire, 19th May. **Audouin's Gull** Meols, Merseyside, 8th January. **Ring-billed Gull** Drift Reservoir, Cornwall, 21st January; near Sennen, Cornwall, 29th April; Cheddar Reservoir, Somerset, 9th August. **Caspian Tern** Point of Ayre, Isle of Man, 5th August. **White-winged Black Tern** Retford, Nottinghamshire, 13th August. **Pallid Swift** Blakeney Point, Norfolk, 12th November. **Alpine Swift** near Kinlochewe, Highland, 28th July. **Roller** Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, 4th December. **Short-toed Lark** Spurn, Humberside, 17th June. **Lesser Short-toed Lark** Spurn, Humberside, 14th November. **Red-rumped Swallow** Bewl Bridge Reservoir, East Sussex, 3rd May; Crumbles, Eastbourne, East Sussex, 6th May. **Swainson's Thrush**, Sumburgh, Shetland, three, 22nd September. **Red-throated Thrush** Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, 22nd January. **Greenish Warbler** Wells, Norfolk, 5th September. **Bonelli's Warbler** Bradworthy, Devon, 3rd May. **Woodchat Shrike** Spurn, Humberside, 11th May. **Little Bunting** Loch of Spiggie, Shetland, 25th September.

## 1983

**Albatross** Muck, Western Isles, 22nd July. **Surf Scoter** Sandwich Bay, Kent, 16th January. **Black Kite** Rhosneigr, Anglesey, Gwynedd, 16th May. **Gyr Falcon** Aber Dysynni, Gwynedd, 14th November. **Baillon's Crake** Marazion, Cornwall, 23rd August. **Marsh Sandpiper** Reston, Borders, 14th August. **Ring-billed Gull** St Helen's, Isle of Wight, 6th February. **Short-toed Lark** Easington, Humberside, 29th May. **Rose-coloured Starling** Sidmouth, Devon, 12th November.

## 1982

**White-billed Diver** Cley, Norfolk, 4th February. **Cory's Shearwater** Peel Castle Rocks, Isle of Man, 18th July. **American Wigeon** Willen Lake, Buckinghamshire, 8th November. **Ring-necked Duck** Slapton Ley, Devon, 21st September. **Red-footed Falcon** Willen Lake, Buckinghamshire, 27th June. **Gyr Falcon** Burghhead, Highland, 20th February. **Broad-billed Sandpiper** Elmley, Kent, 11th August. **Bonaparte's Gull** Ynys-Hir, Dyfed, 21st November. **Slender-billed Gull** Hanover Point, Isle of Wight, 19th September; St Helen's, Isle of Wight, 12th December. **Gull-billed Tern** Ryde, Isle of Wight, 8th July. **Savi's Warbler** Shanklin, Isle of Wight, 28th April.

## 1981

**Cory's Shearwater** Peel Castle Rocks, Isle of Man, 10th August. **American Wigeon** Davidstow, Cornwall, 5th October; Livermere, Suffolk, 25th September; Burrator Reservoir, Devon, 10th November. **Gyr Falcon** Sandwich Bay, Kent, 1st October. **Little Swift** Fowey, Cornwall, 21st August. **Aquatic Warbler** West Somerton, Norfolk, 27th September.

## 1980

**American Wigeon** Cley, Norfolk, 3rd September. **Red-footed Falcon** New Forest, Hampshire, ♂, 12th July. **Red-throated Pipit** Capel Fleet, Kent, 28th August.

## 1979

**White-tailed Eagle** Shanklin, Isle of Wight, two, 12th March.



**1977****Purple Heron** Hickling, Norfolk, 7th June. **Alpine Swift** Shanklin, Isle of Wight, 13th October.**1975****Purple Heron** Sheringham, Norfolk, 17th May.**1972****Black Kite** Ramsgate, Kent, 30th November.**1963****Parrot Crossbill** Whatton Manor, Nottinghamshire, 3rd March.**'Category D' records not accepted****1985****Saker** North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 18th September.

## Seventy-five years ago...

'THE "BRITISH BIRDS" MARKING SCHEME. PROGRESS FOR 1911 AND SOME RESULTS BY H. F. WITHERBY. Once again I am able to report decided progress in the work of our enthusiastic band of "ringers". The number of birds marked has steadily increased until this year the splendid total of just nine thousand five hundred has been reached. In the first year of the inquiry only 2,200 rings were used, but in the next year 7,900 were placed, so that the number of birds "ringed" by the readers of *BRITISH BIRDS* now amounts to nearly twenty thousand.' (*Brit. Birds* 5: 158, November 1911)

## Mystery photographs



**119** The size and structure of last month's mystery bird (plate 264, repeated here) are obviously those of a warbler. The combination of generally unmarked upperparts, rather small bill, noticeable supercilium and non-rounded tail suggests a *Phylloscopus*. Its shape does not recall Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, and it lacks wing bars and striking supercilia, eliminating all but Bonelli's Warbler *P. bonelli*, Mountain Chiffchaff *P. sindianus*, Chiffchaff *P. collybita* and Willow Warbler *P. trochilus*. The primaries extend beyond the secondaries by about half the length of the exposed tertials and secondaries, so our bird cannot be Bonelli's or Willow Warbler, the primary extension of each being more equal in length to the exposed tertials and secondaries. The choice, then, lies between Mountain Chiffchaff and Chiffchaff. Or does it? Is it possible that we have been too hasty, too willing to accept a process of elimination, and thus been preoccupied with the characters this fairly plain-looking warbler does not possess, rather than those that it does?

A more positive approach is to note the washed-out appearance of the tertials, caused by broad, pale, diffuse fringes merging into darker centres, a rather long tail with a rounded tip to each feather, the broad, whitish fringe down the entire length of the outer web of the outermost tail feather and extending around the tip of the feather, the pale fringes and tips of adjacent tail feathers, and the whitish extreme tip to the upper mandible. These characters identify the mystery bird as an autumn Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata*.

There are numerous further features to notice on this species in autumn, many of which are rather subtle, the more obvious ones being the somewhat *Phylloscopus*-like appearance, only a fraction larger than Chiffchaff, but with a more domed crown, a plumper body, longer, thicker legs, and short undertail-coverts; a flesh-coloured lower mandible, except for a dark extreme tip; grey, grey-brown or pink legs and feet; no true eye-stripe, but an often-obvious band of dark brownish immediately above the supercilium; generally pale brownish-grey or sandy-grey upperparts, with paler fringes to the secondaries visible as a wing panel, and sometimes showing greenish tones, and often with a rusty wash to the centres of the tertials, the uppertail-coverts and the basal half of the central tail feathers; off-white underparts, never with any yellow, but often with a buff wash on the sides of the breast and on the undertail-coverts; the soft, but grating 'tchark' call note; and the normal habitat of ground vegetation rather than bushes and trees. Confronted with a Booted Warbler in the field, an observer should bear in mind the possibility of small Olivaceous Warbler *H. pallida*, and also consider the often very different appearance of the two races of Booted (*caligata* and *rama*), but those aspects are beyond the scope of this short text.

This Booted Warbler, the first for Netherlands, was photographed by Arnoud B. van den Berg at Terschelling on 2nd October 1982.

PETER LANSDOWN

197 Springwood, Llanedeyrn, Cardiff, South Glamorgan CF26UG





298. Mystery photograph 120. How carefully do you read your "BB"? Identify this species, *without* consulting any identification papers which have appeared in *British Birds*. Answer next month

## Notes

**Squacco Heron eating passerines** On 11th April 1984, at Eilat, Israel, I watched a Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* catching passerines in a field of alfalfa. In one hour of only intermittent observation, three birds were seen to be caught and swallowed whole, with considerable difficulty. At least one was a Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, and probably all were. *BWP* (1: 275-276) makes no mention of birds among the food of Squacco Heron, but states that prey items are up to about 10 cm in length. The length of a Red-throated Pipit is about 14.5 cm.



P. R. GORDON

*Dairy Cottage, Craighielaw, Longniddry, East Lothian EH32 0PY*

*The Herons Handbook* (Hancock & Kushlan 1981) mentions only one passerine, a Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*, in the prey of Squacco Heron; and only one other bird species, a dead Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*, which a Squacco attempted to swallow. Eds

**Ducks 'spinning'** Dr J. T. R. Sharrock's note on a female Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* 'spinning' (*Brit. Birds* 77: 355) recalled an incident on 8th November 1981, at Strathclyde Country Park, when a drake Shoveler *A. clypeata* engaged in exactly the same behaviour. It was alone on an area of fairly shallow water where various sedges and grasses broke the surface. At the time, I joked about it imitating a phalarope *Phalaropus*, the spinning being mechanical and continuous and not the 'swimming in a circle' recorded in *BWP* vol. 1. Like Dr Sharrock, I too was involved in a wildfowl count and returned to find the Shoveler still spinning; although I did not count the revolutions one way and the other, the description fitted exactly.

J. C. MAXWELL

7 Lilac Hill, Hamilton, Strathclyde

### **Extent of light area on flanks on adult male Ring-necked Duck**

Paintings of adult male Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris* in some important ornithological works give an impression that it is not the extent of the pale area on the flanks that helps separate this species from adult male Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*, but the shape, which is considered to be more rounded. This is also apparent in Keith Vinicombe's notes and sketches (*Brit. Birds* 75: 327-328). In my opinion, the light area on male Ring-necked is more extensive, as well as being more rounded. This is brought about by the amount of black on the breast being noticeably less than is the case in adult male Tufted. At present, one can only speculate whether published sketches of supposed Ring-necked  $\times$  Tufted Duck hybrids (e.g. 75: 327) truly portray breast and flank patterns similar to male Ring-necked or to male Tufted. These points are especially important, since male hybrids between these two species are likely to have breast and flank patterns similar to either species or in between the two.

Useful photographs of adult male Ring-necked Duck appear in Mendall (1958, *The Ring-necked Duck in the Northeast*), Linduska (1964, *Waterfowl Tomorrow*) and Johnsgard (1968, *Waterfowl*).

E. H. GILLHAM

31 Coast Drive, Lydd-on-Sea, Romney Marsh, Kent TN29 9NL

### **Pinioned Goosanders catching and drowning House Martins**

On 27th and 28th May 1984, at the Wildfowl Trust's Arundel Centre in West Sussex, rain had brought House Martins *Delichon urbica* very low down in their search for insects, and several pinioned Goosanders *Mergus merganser* were observed trying to snatch them out of the air. The first Goosander which we saw to be successful was a drake; it drowned its prey which it appeared to try to swallow over the next ten minutes, but it disappeared around an island before I could confirm that it had swallowed the martin. The second case involved a female; she played with her catch for some time before eventually losing interest and swimming away. Some years ago, at the Martin Mere reserve in Lancashire, a Goosander snatched a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* from the shore and drowned it. It would be interesting to know if the habit of catching aerial food, including dragonflies and birds, also occurs in the wild.

JIM STEVENSON

RSPB, Vane Farm Nature Centre, by Loch Leven, Kinross KY13 7LX



**Red Kite fishing like Osprey** On 3rd March 1984, I had just finished refurbishing some nestboxes beside the Hannedse, a small lake on the military ranges near Paderborn, Westphalia, West Germany. The day was cool and cloudy, with little wind and no rain. The water in the lake had recently been reduced to about one-third of its capacity to permit conservation work; the remaining water was shallow and the fish were therefore easily seen, particularly around the periphery where it was barely 8-10 cm deep. As I approached my car through the trees, I heard a loud splash 30 m away and looked up to see a Red Kite *Milvus milvus* struggling back into the air with a very large fish in its talons. The fish wriggled wildly and tried every way it could to free itself, as often seen in similar circumstances with a fish and an Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*. The kite then circled above the lake, while eating the fish in flight. It was joined by its mate and both then continued to circle together, one busily biting into the fish and the other trying very hard to join in, or to assist the captor to drop its prey. I watched them for 4½ minutes before they disappeared above some trees. The fish was still securely held. The Red Kite is seen daily in this area, but this was the first time I had seen it near the water, let alone in it. A. J. CREASE

*The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, Athlone Barracks, British Forces Post Office 16*

**Skylark using human beings as refuge** On 22nd October 1983, at Barbrook Reservoir, Derbyshire, R. P. Blagden, K. R. Gould and I noticed a female Merlin *Falco columbarius* pursuing a Skylark *Alauda arvensis* towards us, in the usual fashion of harrying and stooping, across the adjacent moorland. At about 30 m range it broke off the attack and veered away, presumably having seen us. The Skylark then dived towards us, alighting at my feet, scuttled into the area between us, flattened itself to the ground, and stayed quite still for 30 seconds or so. Believing the lark to have been injured during the chase, I bent down to pick it up, whereupon it flew strongly along the reservoir embankment and alighted in a clump of heather. I have not heard of passerines using human beings as a shield against predators, which I am certain was the lark's intention. M. E. TAYLOR

*76 Hawksley Avenue, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S40 4TL*

**Blackbird scavenging nestling House Sparrow** At about 15.00 GMT on 16th May 1984, at Wye College, Ashford, Kent, a male Blackbird *Turdus merula* was seen pecking at an object on a tarmac drive beside an ivy-covered wall. On closer inspection, the object was seen to be a small dead passerine chick aged about three days, which I considered was probably that of a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* as there were a number of their nests with nestlings in the ivy. As the Blackbird appeared reluctant to leave the chick, I stood back and watched. The Blackbird remained still for about two minutes, and then began jabbing at the chick again, perhaps eight to ten times. It then jerked it into its mouth and swallowed it head first, with no apparent difficulty. This bird had been noted in the same area on a number of occasions before and has been since; as the tarmac at this point appears to be devoid of any other food, and as House Sparrow chicks are frequently

found on the ground beneath their nests, it seems possible that this was not the first time that this Blackbird had scavenged such food.

CHRIS HODGSON

*Department of Biological Sciences, Wye College, near Ashford, Kent*

**Blackbird presenting elvers to young** On 11th August 1983, at Bodorgan, Anglesey, I watched from about 4m the behaviour of a female Blackbird *Turdus merula* at a shallow garden stream. It was feeding a fully fledged young in a thick shrubbery some 4m away, and was hunting for food by the edge of the water. Its attention was directed to the water, where it waded and picked up a silvery object which was clearly seen to be an elver about 7 cm in length. This it took to the edge of the shrubbery, where the young bird darted out of the bushes and immediately swallowed the elver which had been presented. The adult returned to the stream, and within about five seconds had captured a further four elvers, all of which it took together in its bill and deposited on the ground before the juvenile; the latter disposed of these one after another. A sixth elver was caught and taken to the shrubbery, but whether this was consumed by the juvenile was not determined. *The Handbook* does not specifically state that elvers form part of a young Blackbird's diet, but does record that a small frog and a stranded minnow have been brought to the nest.

JOHN P. WILKINSON

*Overstrand, Malltraeth, Bodorgan, Anglesey LL62 5AW*

Derek Goodwin has commented as follows: 'I believe that elver-taking has been recorded, but what does seem new and interesting here is that the adult Blackbird put the food *on the ground in front of the young*, not in its mouth as normal.' Eds

**Birds bathing in deep water** During the years 1982-85, near Ringwould, Kent, I observed certain bird species bathing in deep water. This took place in drinking troughs 75 cm deep, 2 m in diameter, with rims 10 cm wide. The first troughs were installed in 1980, and, by 1984, 16 were scattered over some 200 ha of farmland. In an arid area, they provided new supplies of water at a variety of sites, some of which were used more frequently than others. The bathing, first noticed in 1982, continued spasmodically all year around; most instances were recorded in dry spells in summer. There were three ways of bathing:

(a) **DIPPING** Birds stood on the rim of the trough, bending over to wet head, neck, and perhaps breast (according to water levels).

(b) **JUMPING** Birds jumped with flapping wings from rim to water, usually returning quickly to a nearby point; juvenile Rooks *Corvus frugilegus*, however, tended to swim across to the other side of the trough.

(c) **DROPPING** From the air, birds dropped down to alight on the water, as if they were landing on the ground. Only when the rim was already crowded did this occur.

As well as Rooks, other species which bathed in the troughs were Jackdaw *C. monedula*, Carrion Crow *C. corone*, Magpie *Pica pica*, Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*, Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* and Stock Dove *C. oenas*. The Rooks, Jackdaws and Carrion Crows were the most numerous and persistent performers, often bathing together in large



numbers in one trough. An individual normally began by dipping, then switched to jumping, each exercise probably repeated several times, and with shaking and preening being interspersed. Carrion Crows dipped and jumped, and possibly dropped. Rooks and Jackdaws used all three methods. The two Turtle Doves and one Stock Dove, all observed briefly, jumped. Starlings, the smallest of the species involved, rarely dipped (water levels may often have been too low); they usually jumped, but sometimes dropped. Elsewhere, I have seen similar behaviour by Starlings at a lake, where a few occasionally dropped into the water to join a crowd of others already bathing or massed on the shore nearby; in New Zealand, Cockrem (1979) described some individuals in a flock of Starlings landing in shallow water in a lake, some flying from one spot to another during the subsequent bathing.

Simmons (1985) listed five methods of bathing in surface water. The one seen most frequently in Europe he named 'stand-in bathing', performed 'while standing or crouching in the water'. The others were 'stand-out bathing' (settled on land at the edge of water); 'in-out bathing' (jumping repeatedly into and out of water); 'flight-bathing' (on the wing, by a series of dips and rises); and 'plunge-bathing' (diving from a perch on to the surface of water, sometimes repeatedly). In these terms, the jumping which I observed is an example of 'in-out bathing', and dipping may rate as 'stand-out bathing' if 'land' covers any form of foothold; the dropping bore little resemblance to either 'flight-bathing' or 'plunge-bathing', nor did it appear to be repetitive.

During 11 years in this locality, I have not seen Rooks, Jackdaws or Carrion Crows bathe other than in the troughs or, occasionally, on flooded fields in winter. Woodpigeons, Turtle Doves, Magpies and Starlings used road puddles and a small birdbath 7 m from my house. Given that the three *Corvus* species rarely linger on the ground near habitation, they were, perhaps, equally wary of approaching water so situated. J. M. STANTON  
Dove Cottage, Church Lane, Ringwould, Deal, Kent CT14 8HR

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**Chaffinch stealing from Greenfinch** The note on Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla* catching falling nuts in flight and robbing Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* (*Brit. Birds* 78: 244) recalls the following incident. In my Cheshire garden, a supply of small seed is maintained over the winter months, along with sunflower seed. Greenfinches, Chaffinches *F. coelebs* and Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus* then visit regularly, with Greenfinch (the only species to husk the sunflower seeds) usually dominant in any interspecific aggression. Several times during the severely cold January of 1982, however, I noticed a Chaffinch waiting by a Greenfinch which was mandibulating a sunflower seed; the Chaffinch was moving forward, evidently to try to take the kernel when it was freed from the husk. On three occasions, I

watched a Chaffinch reach forward and remove the kernel from the husk while the Greenfinch still held this in its bill, exerting pressure to prise the husk open. Both male and female Chaffinches were seen to deprive Greenfinches of food in this way.

THELMA K. SYKES

*Newcroft, Saughall, Chester CH1 6EL*

**Food-robbery as alternative feeding strategy of Chaffinch** The note by Ewan Brodie, describing how a Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* seized a peanut from a Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* at a bird-feeder (*Brit. Birds* 78: 244), prompts me to record similar behaviour from the Chaffinch *F. coelebs*. Chaffinches will rob each other of food when foraging, and the extension of such behaviour to the robbing of other species on occasion is not in itself a phenomenon worthy of special note, being common among sociable passerines generally as a casual (or facultative) practice. My observations, however, suggest that the Chaffinch has developed the habit of interspecific food-robbery to such an extent that it amounts to an alternative strategy to normal foraging in certain situations, and the same could well apply to the Brambling.

During the three winters of 1978/79-80/81, in the garden of my former home at Oadby near Leicester, peanuts were supplied for the birds in a square (RSPB-type) wire holder and later, from mid-January 1980, in a tubular ('Dina-bird') one. Regular feeders among the finch-like birds included House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*, Greenfinches, and, on the 'Dina-bird', Reed Buntings *Emberiza schoeniclus*, but none of the few Chaffinches that wintered in the garden was ever seen on either holder, though, like certain individuals of the other three species, they would forage for fallen scraps below. Yet the Chaffinches, as well as the other birds that fed directly on the holders, could often be seen carrying away whole or half peanuts to eat, either on the ground or more usually on a flat or flattish surface (the horizontal boughs of a large ash *Fraxinus excelsior* being the favourite site). There, as their behaviour repertory lacks the habit of holding or clamping down food in the foot, all would deal with the item in the same clumsy manner, placing it down and nibbling away at it: a prolonged procedure which often led to the dropping of the peanut, or part of it, and its recovery by another bird of the same or another species. It eventually became apparent that only the Chaffinches—one female in particular each year (perhaps the same individual), but also males—were exploiting this situation in a systematic way and were regularly robbing other garden passerines of their food, especially during the period December to February.

The method used was highly distinctive: (1) the Chaffinch would 'mark' a bird that had extracted a peanut; (2) follow (stalk, tag, or dog) it until it put the seed down to eat it; (3) potter about nearby, in an 'innocent' and 'inoffensive' manner, gradually getting closer; and (4) dart in quickly, seize the nut or a fragment of it, and make off immediately. Less frequently, similar attempts were seen against birds with other items of food. The species robbed were mainly Greenfinches and House Sparrows, but



attempts were seen against Blue Tits *Parus caeruleus* and, in the case of bread, Blackbirds *Turdus merula*. If no actual robbery had been effected, the Chaffinch would eat up any fragments left after the would-be victim had departed. The Chaffinches robbed one another too at times, but mainly by direct supplanting attacks, usually male on female.

I have since seen similar food-robbing behaviour in our present garden in Leicester itself, where Chaffinches are only irregular winter visitors, but have not been able to document it in any detail. There is much scope here for an interesting study of such kleptoparasitism by the Chaffinch and the Brambling, both in the artificial garden situation and under more natural conditions.

K. E. L. SIMMONS

66 Romway Road, Leicester LE5 5SB

## Letter

**Depths to which auks dive** With reference to the recent note on 'Razorbill [*Alca torda*] swimming at depth of 140 m' (*Brit. Birds* 79: 339), I draw attention to a paper published in *The Auk* last year on 'Diving depths of four alcids' by John F. Piatt and David N. Nettleship (*Auk* 102: 293-297). This gave a series of well-researched diving depths, gained from information from bottom-set fishing nets off Newfoundland. To quote the Razorbill section: 'we conclude that Razorbills can dive to depths of at least 120 m.' This was based on a small sample size, but Guillemots *Uria aalge* were much commoner in the area and were found regularly to dive to at least 180 m (the depth of the sea floor), and, from the data available, the authors concluded that 'they may dive to even greater depths.' Puffins *Fratercula arctica*, however, were not recorded below 60 m, and Black Guillemots *Cephus grylle* not below 50 m.

MARK TASKER

Seabirds Team, Nature Conservancy Council, North East (Scotland) Region.

Wynne-Edwards House, 17 Rubislaw Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1XE

## Announcements

**The Joint 'BB'-BTO Conference** We hope that many *BB* subscribers will attend this conference at Swanwick, Derbyshire, during 10th-12th April 1987. *A booking form is inserted in this issue.*

The programme includes the following speakers: Tony Marr on 'British (and Irish) birding', Peter Grant on 'Rare Birds — the work of the Rarities Committee', John Marchant on 'The Common Birds Census and its uses', Dr Malcolm Ogilvie on 'Ringing big birds', Richard Porter on 'Rare breeding birds—the work of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel', Chris Mead on 'Ringing little birds', John Mather on 'The British List—the work of the BOU Records Committee', Clive Hutchinson on 'Squaring up to Atlas work', and Bryan Bland on 'Birding abroad'.

There will be a mystery slide competition run by Alan Dean; an exhibition of bird paintings and drawings (which will be for sale) arranged

by Derick Watson; a set of mystery ornithological objects to identify, organised by the British Museum (Natural History); a bookshop run by the Natural History Book Service; the opportunity to buy binoculars or telescopes from 'In Focus'; and an exhibition of *ZEISS West Germany* optical equipment.

All the members of the 'BB' Rarities Committee, the 'BB' Notes Panels, the BOU Records Committee and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, and every one of Britain's 70-odd County Bird Recorders have been invited to attend, and we hope that most will be there, to meet and chat with 'BB' subscribers and BTO members.

Please return your completed booking form to Mrs Gwen Bonham, BTO, Beech Grove, Station Road, Tring, Hertfordshire HP23 5NR.

**Post-Conference Cyprus trip** Timed especially to follow on from the BB-BTO Joint Conference (see above), *British Birds* has arranged with the bird tour firm SUNBIRD for an exploratory trip to Cyprus: see 'Announcement' in August issue (*Brit. Birds* 79: 407-408). The two leaders, Bill Oddie and David Fisher, both hope to be at the Conference and perhaps to meet participants in the Cyprus trip there. If you wish to receive full details of the BB-Sunbird Cyprus trip, please write to David Fisher at Sunbird, PO Box 76, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 1DF.

**Greatly reduced joint subscription to 'American Birds' and 'British Birds'** The well-known journal, *American Birds*, appears quarterly, with a special additional 'Christmas Bird Count' number, and the five issues total over 1,000 pages annually. Many *British Birds* readers would probably like to be able to subscribe, but have never had an opportunity to do so easily.

Now, we can offer a joint subscription for the two journals, at a 25% reduction on both. Payment can be made either in pounds sterling or in US dollars. If you already pay your *British Birds* subscription by Direct Debit, you can simply ask us to adjust your payment to cover both magazines. We hope that many *British Birds* readers will take advantage of this offer, arranged specially with the editor of *American Birds*. Please use the form on page xv.

**Your January issue** Please note the 'Request' below: 'Resubscription urgency'. As usual, the January issue will be despatched in mid month (rather than in the last week of the preceding month, as with all other issues). This is partly the result of Christmas and New Year holidays affecting our and our printers' work schedules, but is also deliberately designed to give time for as many resubscriptions as possible to be included in the new year's address list. Expect your January issue in the second half of the month (or in February, if you resubscribed late).

**Sponsorship of BPY** After supporting our Bird Photograph of the Year competition since 1981, *The Famous Grouse* Scotch whisky has now discontinued this sponsorship. We are most grateful to the proprietors, Matthew Gloag & Son Ltd, and to all their staff, especially Martin Banks, for their help and co-operation over the past six years. The parting has been



most amicable, and *The Famous Grouse* will, indeed, continue to sponsor our annual Christmas Puzzle.

We are delighted to announce that new sponsorship of Bird Photograph of the Year has been arranged. In 1987, the two publishing firms, Christopher Helm Publishers Ltd and Wm Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, will jointly be supporting our annual competition. The links of both these companies with natural history books must be very well known already to most *BB* readers. This help for the journal is much appreciated.

## Requests

**Resubscription urgency** If your subscription runs from January to December and you want to receive your January 1987 issue in January, please resubscribe NOW (or before the end of November at the latest). The end-of-the-year rush creates a mountain of mail, and everyone's computer entry has to be updated ready for the label production for the January issue. We guarantee to ensure that all resubscriptions received by 28th November will be dealt with in time for the despatch of the January issue. (Late resubscriptions will be processed if possible, but it may be inevitable that subscribers renewing after 28th November receive their January issue in February.) As usual, your address label is in red if your subscription is due, and the resubscription form is on the back.

*Subscribers using Direct Debit need take no action.*

**'BWP' vol. 6** We are now preparing volume 6 and would welcome any data on behaviour, voice, food and migration for any species. The following species have been little studied, so any relevant data would be particularly useful: Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis*, Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata*, Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*, Cape Verde Cane Warbler *A. brevipennis*, Clamorous Reed Warbler *A. stentoreus*, Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*, Olive-tree Warbler *H. olivetorum*, Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda*, Tristram's Warbler *S. deserticola*, Ménétries's Warbler *S. mystacea*, Cyprus Warbler *S. melanothorax*, Rüppell's Warbler *S. rueppelli*, Green Warbler *Phylloscopus nitidus*, Greenish Warbler *P. trochiloides*, Mountain Chiffchaff *P. sindianus* (including 'Caucasian Chiffchaff' *P. s. lorenzii*), Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata*, the babblers *Turdoides altirostris*, *T. caudatus*, *T. squamiceps*, and *T. fulvus*, Azure Tit *Parus cyanus*, the sunbirds *Anthreptes platurus*, *A. metallicus* and *Nectarinia osea*, Black-headed Bush Shrike *Tchagra senegala*, Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*, and Masked Shrike *L. nubicus*.

Please send your information to Stanley Cramp, West Palearctic Birds Ltd, 71 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1N 8TP.

**Birds of Kashmir** All bird records for Kashmir (old as well as recent) are required for an annotated checklist to be published in the British Ornithologists' Union's series. The area to be covered includes Gilgit, Hunza, Baltistan, Chilas, Muzaffarabad, Ladakh, Zaskar, Rupshu, Kashmir Valley, Punch, Riasi, Udhampur, Mirpur, Jammu, and Kathua. Some areas, such as Jammu, have virtually no published records.

Full acknowledgment will be given for all information received. Send all records to either Dr P. R. Holmes, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Pembroke Place, Liverpool L3 5QA, or Dr A. J. Parr, Institute of Food Research, Colney Lane, Norwich, Norfolk NR4 7UA.

**Birds in Oman** A records committee has been in existence since work started on *The Birds of Oman* in 1977. The additional bird records which were included in *Tuyur Oman*—the Arabic language version of *The Birds of Oman*, published in 1985—were also approved by this committee. A copy of the periodic revisions of the Oman Bird List will be sent free of charge to any interested party. All further records will be welcomed; those for species which are scarce should be supported by detailed field notes. Please send records to David Foster, Recorder, Oman Bird Records Committee, c/o PO Box 246, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

# Reviews

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**Birds of Iceland.** By Hjalmar R. Bardarson. Hjalmar R. Bardarson, Reykjavik, 1986. 336 pages; 392 colour plates; many black-and-white illustrations; some line-drawings. Icelandic kronur 2220.00 (approx. £36.00).

This is not just a book about Iceland's birds, indeed it is not a conventional avifauna at all, despite the title. It is a celebration in superb colour photography of the richness and delight of virtually all the 70-or-so breeding species, plus a good selection of vagrants, together with their habitats.

The book is divided into chapters loosely linked to habitats or bird groups, thus: islands and skerries, cliff-birds, ducks, the highlands. There are also introductory chapters indicating good areas to visit, and a fascinating history of the Great Auk. The text is accurate and up-to-date, but often quite generalised, with no attempt to detail the full distribution or status of many species. Some information is included, however, that is probably not widely known, such as the fantastic abundance of the auk species, with estimated Icelandic populations of 1,600,000 pairs of Guillemots, and approaching 500,000 pairs of Razorbills.

But it is the photographs, rather than the text, which make the book and which give such pleasure on page after page. If the book seems pricey, just think of it as less than 10p per colour photograph, and then it seems cheap!

M. A. OGILVIE

**Birds of New Guinea.** By Bruce M. Beehler, Thane K. Pratt, and Dale A. Zimmerman. Illustrated by Dale A. Zimmerman and James Coe. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1986. 293 pages; 47 colour plates; 8 black-and-white plates; 13 line-drawings. Hardback \$65.00; paperback £37.50.

This is the long-awaited first field-guide to the birds of one of the most ornithologically exciting regions of the world. It is also the first complete work on the birds of New Guinea since Rand & Gilliard's *Handbook of New Guinea Birds* (1967), which has long been out of print and difficult to obtain. The book covers all of the more than 700 species of the region, and most of them are illustrated in colour—many for the first time.

The book begins with a detailed introduction to the region, with sections on climate, biogeography, rain-forest ecology, and conservation. There is a brief section on birdwatching in New Guinea, and an ornithological gazetteer is included, along with four maps showing natural features and important ornithological localities.

The text for each species is very brief, but covers distribution, behaviour and voice as well as identification. The information, so far as it goes, seems good and concisely presented, but I would have preferred far more detail and a 'heavier' book to take into the field. Most species are described in about 20 words, so most of the book's worth for identification purposes rests on the plates. The plates are generally very good, yet for both artists they do seem to vary somewhat in quality. Coe's herons, raptors and rails are a delight, yet his wader plates seem to have been done with much less care. Similarly, most of Zimmerman's plates are exquisite (especially his kingfishers, whistlers and birds of paradise) but some, such as the swallows and flying raptors, are much less pleasing. The lack of species distribution maps is disappointing. Such maps are relatively easy to produce and convey so much at a glance, especially to a reader unfamiliar with the local geography and for whom range descriptions are especially difficult to follow.

As with all of the field guides coming from the Princeton stable, the book is beautifully produced, but extremely expensive. It seems hard to justify a price tag of over £25.00 for a paperback containing old-fashioned and cost-cutting black-and-white plates and no distribution maps. It seems harder still to justify charging almost an extra £20 to those of us who think field guides should be hardback and made to last.



This volume is, of course, absolutely indispensable for anyone birdwatching in New Guinea. How I wish I had had a copy on my first visit to this ornithologically fabulous sub-continent!

S. J. M. GANTLETT

**A Bird in the Hand.** By Ann Cleeves. Century Hutchinson, London, 1986. 200 pages. £9.95.

I hope 'a good read' does not qualify me for Pseudos Corner. This whodunnit (or perhaps 'grip-offit' might be more appropriate, but you won't understand that until you have read it) is compulsive stuff for all birders, particularly twitchers. It is 'their book'. So many novels that introduce birds, birdwatchers or the bird scene get it all wrong; this does not. The characters and settings—you have met them or been there—are frighteningly accurate. The story is well woven, with birding-veteran George Palmer-Jones as the person set to solve the mystery. And the final outcome is not so far-fetched. Be warned: this murder could happen in real birding life. Indeed, I am surprised it has not. This is Ann Cleeves's first novel (we are promised more) and its ratings from the non-birding scene will be interesting to watch—I felt too close to the subject to be objective.

The question now is: will Palmer-Jones become the Clouseau, sorry Poirot, of birding mythology? Read it; at £9.95 you know it makes sense.

RICHARD PORTER

**Collins Field Notebook of British Birds.** By Roger Lovegrove and Philip Snow. Collins, London, 1986. 128 pages; 56 colour plates. £7.95.

This pocket-sized book comes in a plastic wallet together with a BTO Checklist and a tear-off notepad. Although a little gimmicky, a novice birdwatcher—at whom the book, which contains just 280 'regular' British species, is presumably aimed—might well find them handy, at least to start with.

Each plate contains up to eight species, sometimes very crowded, with captions highlighting identification points. The facing text briefly, and fairly accurately, covers distribution and habits. Curiously, but doubtless to keep the book within the magic 128 pages (an economic 'round' number in the publishing world), there are four plates without facing text—covering storks, egrets, swans, and marshland warblers. For these often-difficult-to-identify groups, one has to rely solely on extended captions, which, I am sad to see, repeat the old myth that Mute Swans are silent.

The plates are perhaps inevitably mixed in quality. Many give the impression of being unfinished, with slightly hairy outlines and a lack of precision in sometimes vital detail. Generally, though, they are quite pleasing, and among pocket guides to the commoner species, which are getting quite numerous, this certainly bears examination. The presence of a notepad may well encourage the beginner to acquire the excellent habit of writing notes about what he sees.

M. A. OGILVIE

## News and comment

*Robin Prytherch and Mike Everett*

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'

**Slaughter of Honey Buzzards continues** Italiana Protezione Uccelli (LIPU)  
In early May, I joined other foreign delegates Conference on the Protection of Birds of Prey  
at Reggio Calabria for the ICBP/Lega in Southern Italy. I represented the RSPB.

*British Birds* and the Anglo-Italian Society for the Protection of Animals.

After many years studying raptor migration in Europe and the Middle East, I was appalled at the plight of birds of prey that run the gauntlet over the narrow waters of the Straits of Messina (between Italy and Sicily) on their way from Africa to their breeding grounds in Europe. These birds—Honey Buzzards *Pernis apivorus* and Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* in particular—present an easy target to hunters hiding in their bunkers on the scrub-covered hillsides. The hunting is now illegal, but traditions die hard and, indeed, become entrenched as the modern conservation movement in Italy, spear-headed by LIPU, demands action.

The tension between the two sides started before the Conference, when the car of an Italian girl delegate was set on fire by a bomb. Anti-conservation slogans were daubed over walls and pavements at and around our hotel and in areas where the hunters operated. At the Conference Centre, there was massive Police protection, particularly when the Minister of Ecology spoke. The Italians' resolve remained, however, and the Conference was well attended. Its resolutions were fully acclaimed. Among these was the establishment of an educational centre on the Straits of Messina to show the Italian public the excitement of watching birds of prey on migration, and also a proposal that a Governmental working party be set up to work with LIPU and ICBP to develop the international tourist potential for birdwatchers and naturalists.

That's all well and good for the long term; for the immediate future, it is important that enforcement is taken more seriously, and I am pleased to report that, this year, for the first time, the Italian Government used helicopters to locate shooting parties. Following the directions of these 'flying squads', forestry guards—well equipped with radio transmitters and receivers—in close co-operation with LIPU members, successfully intervened, and several hunters were arrested.

The international birding world will continue to watch southern Italy carefully. It remains a blot on the bird protection scene, and European countries in which these migrant birds of prey breed have a right to be very angry. (Contributed by Richard Porter) [*British Birds* has donated £50.00 to the 'Stop the Massacre' Fund which will be used for future educational work in southern Italy. Eds]

**Gurney's Pitta rediscovered** Some people carry a photograph of their wife or girlfriend in their wallets, but Bangkok-based Phil Round has for some time carried a photograph of Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi*. How fitting, therefore, that it should be he and Uthai Treesucon who discovered a pair (and later found its nest, only the second ever seen by an ornithologist) in southern Thailand in June 1986. This was the first sighting of the species in the wild by any ornithologist for 35 years. Indeed, there were worries that it might be extinct, since its lowland-forest habitat has been almost entirely destroyed. (JTRS)

**Thorburn on show** John Southern's unique collection of 200 of Archibald Thorburn's works are now on show in a new setting. The art gallery at the Dobwalls Theme Park, Cornwall (on the A38 between Bodmin and Plymouth), has been converted from a traditional setting into small rooms and cameos which place the artist's work in sets, all built with natural materials, thereby recreating the appearance and atmosphere of the countryside and environment that Thorburn would have known in Edwardian Britain. The atmosphere is further enhanced with appropriate smells and sounds; the Cairngorms room, for example, is chilled, and Ptarmigan calls help to recreate a feeling of being above 600m. John Southern hopes that by setting Thorburn in this way people will appreciate his skills all the more. There are facilities for the handicapped, including guide books in Braille.

**Alan Johnston—seven years on** Soon after winning the Richard Richardson Award in 1979, Alan Fred Johnston found himself on a course tutored by the late Dr Eric Ennion, then spent vacations in the Outer Hebrides and on the Isle of May (when Keith Brockie was sketching there). In 1982, he worked 'for five weeks during February-March at the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, assisting in the Taxidermy Department', and warded eagles in the Lake District for the RSPB. Since being accepted for the Wildlife Illustration Course at Dyfed College of Art in 1983, Alan has expanded his taxidermy, photography and natural history interests and skills. In the following year, he ran field-sketching weekends and visited Skokholm. In 1985, he visited Mallorca and, having



gained a 'Distinction Pass' and received the Wildlife Student of the Year Award, then returned to Skokholm as a voluntary assistant warden (he implemented a bracken-management plan), in the same month as he led a field centre course in Cornwall. As well as all this, Alan has, among many other things, completed a wildlife calendar for the Royal Insurance Group, had his work published in Valerie Thom's *Birds in Scotland* and John Busby's *How to Draw Birds* (and elsewhere), and provided wildlife studies for the Welsh Arts Council Gallery. Alan is now working as a graphic designer/illustrator at The National Museum of Natural History, Luxembourg, and will be pleased to help any 'British Birders' visiting the country. His contact address is c/o Musée d'Histoire Naturelle, Marché aux Poissons, L2345 Luxembourg.

**'The Atlas of Breeding Birds in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg'** Due for publication in late 1986/early 1987, there's a special prepublication offer on this 320-page book: instead of the post-publication price of 980 Luxembourg or Belgian Francs (plus postage), it can be ordered for F780; payment by cheque or credit transfer to Luxembourg postal giro account (CCP) No. 51131-12 held by the Ligue Luxembourgeoise pour la Protection de la Nature et des Oiseaux (Boîte Postale 709, Luxembourg, Tel.: 472369).

**Want to photograph birds in the North Yemen?** Bird-photographer David Hosking and Oriental Bird Club Council member Rodney Martins will jointly be leading a trip for photographers and birdwatchers to the North Yemen in early April 1987. Trips especially designed for bird-photographers are not all that frequent, so anyone interested may care to seek further details from the organisers: Hosking Tours, Hunworth, Melton Constable, Norfolk NR24 2AA.

**A 'birdwatching break'** Northumberland must be able to boast one of the richest year-round bird faunas in England, yet most visitors see it only in the summer months. All that may soon change, however, if Gordon Inkster, an enterprising local hotelier, has his way. For his forthcoming programme of Northumberland Special Interest Holidays includes a number of 'out of season' birdwatching weekends and longer holidays, at realistic prices, based in his attractive 200-year-old family-run Marine House Hotel (once a granary) overlooking the sea at

Alnmouth. In conjunction with local ornithologist, Wendy Dickson, he has devised a series of monthly breaks, from seeking out migrants on Holy Island in October and a November wildfowl weekend to watching the arrival of spring migrants during the early May Bank Holiday. Anyone interested in finding out more about these winter breaks should write to Gordon Inkster, Marine House Private Hotel, Alnmouth, Northumberland NE66 2RW.

**'Voyage of the Iceberg'** Some years ago, an Oxonian Scholar Gypsy called Dick Brown got tired of knocking on Preferment's Door and disappeared into the eastern Canadian Arctic to prepare an *Atlas of Canadian Seabirds* (currently updated in a revised edition). He has now made use of an imaginary reconstruction of the history of the iceberg which sank the S.S. *Titanic* as a frame for a portrait of the area (*Voyage of the Iceberg*. By R. G. B. Brown. Bodley Head, London, 1983. 152 pages; 35 black-and-white illustrations. £9.95). The writing has a spare, lyrical quality otherwise unequalled by the present generation of ornithologists (according to his own account, with every word individually selected and washed in the finest Scotch . . .), and in Canada has already won the Sportsman's Outdoor Writing Award and Canada Council Translation Prize. Among various curious information, he has unearthed a story that the vessel which failed to come to the rescue of the castaways may have been an illicit Norwegian sealer named the *Samson*, whose captain thought the distress rockets were shots from a patrol vessel. It would have been interesting to see some documentation for this. (*Contributed by Dr W. R. P. Bourne*)

**The Ashes** The little urn which is the symbolic trophy regularly contested by England and Australia has been relegated to second place now that another exists—containing the charred remnants of copies of *Birds* and *Bird Study*. Twice every summer, the 'flannelled fools' of the RSPB and the BTO leave behind the cares of conservation and ornithological research and do battle on the cricket fields of Waresley (not far from Sandy) and Tring. The BTO won the Ashes in the first year, 1984, only to lose them to the RSPB in 1985 and again in 1986; perhaps the BTO needs a demon-bowler on its staff, if only to do something about Gareth Thomas, whose scores for the RSPB in the matches played so far have been 50, 51, 43, 2, 43, and 56 not out!

# Recent reports



*Keith Allsopp and Ian Dawson*

**These are largely unchecked reports, not authenticated records**

The dates in this report refer to August unless otherwise stated.

## **Weather and displaced migrants**

For most of the month, the weather was unsettled. Atlantic depressions tracked eastwards across Britain and Ireland, bringing in cool Arctic air southwards on their western sides and inducing many migrants to take advantage of the tail winds to move south.

At Spurn (Humberside), 15,000 **Swifts** *Apus apus* were on their way south on 7th. Brief periods of easterly winds on the northern side of these depressions brought in a few Continental vagrants. **Aquatic Warblers** *Acrocephalus paludicola* were found on Fair Isle (Shetland) on 7th, Jersey (Channel Islands) on 9th, Teesmouth (Cleveland) on 12th—the first for 35 years—and one in the Isles of Scilly on 19th. There were **Icterine Warblers** *Hippolais icterina* at Landguard (Suffolk) on 11th and 12th, Sandwich Bay on 12th and 13th, and Fair Isle on 15th, 16th and 19th. Fair Isle also attracted a **Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia* on 20th and a **Scarlet Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* on 14th, the latter species also appearing on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 16th, and at Firkeel (Co. Cork) on 24th. **Pied Fly-**

**catchers** *Ficedula hypoleuca* arrived in small numbers in English southeast coastal areas on 10th to 12th, and an interesting find was two **Penduline Tits** *Remiz pendulinus* at Westbere (Kent) on 19th.

On 25th, a particularly vigorous depression tracked across the Midlands and became stationary in the North Sea for the rest of the month; the associated weather fronts also became slow-moving and orientated west to east across northern Europe from northeast England. The nearby coastal areas experienced a substantial fall of migrants, on 26th: about 50 **Wrynecks** *Jynx torquilla* were seen between Spurn and Holy Island (Northumberland), with many further records on the following days farther south and inland. Five **Greenish Warblers** *Phylloscopus trochiloides* were also found on the English northeast coast from 26th to 28th, as were three **Ortolan Buntings** *Emberiza hortulana*, and further **Scarlet Rosefinches** on Fair Isle on 26th and at Spurn on 29th. **Marsh Warblers** *Acrocephalus palustris* arrived on Fair Isle on 27th and on North Ronaldsay on 26th, and single **Citrine Wagtails** *Motacilla citreola* landed at Marazion (Cornwall) on 27th and in the Isles of Scilly on 31st. Also in the west, Skomer (Dyfed) received its second-ever **Nuthatch**



*Sitta europaea* on 28th, a **Wryneck** on 30th and an **Ortolan Bunting** on 31st. Perhaps reflecting a more northeasterly Continental origin were the arrivals of **Barred Warblers** *Sylvia nisoria* from 23rd and especially on 25th along the British east coast, together with a very early **Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* at Tynemouth (Tyne & Wear). One **Barred Warbler** did cross Britain, being found near Workington (Cumbria) on 30th. **Red-backed Shrikes** *Lanius collurio* began to appear from 18th, with several in northeastern England on 26th, and further **Icterine Warblers** arrived on the British east coast. Other notable passerine reports were of **Bonelli's Warblers** *Phylloscopus bonelli*, one at East Soar Cove (Devon) from 23rd to 29th and another in the Isles of Scilly on 1st September; a **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* at Bromley-by-Bow, London, on 24th, and several **Tawny Pipits** *Anthus campestris* in southeastern England.

A **Serin** *Serinus serinus* could still be found at Wells (Norfolk) into early August, as could a **Rose-coloured Starling** *Sturnus roseus* at Kesh (Co. Fermanagh) until 18th.

### Waders

The autumn passage migration increased during the month, but no species arrived in exceptional numbers. **Ruffs** *Philomachus pugnax* were well represented at most sites, with a notable concentration of about 100 at Prestwick Carr (Northumberland) after the gales on 27th, and also **Greenshanks** *Tringa nebularia*, with up to 30 at some localities.



**Spotted Redshanks** *T. erythropus* were well distributed, but **Curlew Sandpipers** *Calidris ferruginea* and **Little Stints** *C. minuta* were both in low numbers. The only other species noticeably affected by the bad weather after 26th were **Red-necked Phalaropes** *Phalaropus lobatus*, of which ten were found inland following three inland records earlier in the month, and **Dotterels** *Charadrius morinellus*, with flocks of over ten being found in south-east England. Notable concentrations of other waders included 100 **Common Sandpipers** *Actitis hypoleucos* at Abberton Reservoir (Essex) on 3rd and 550 **Ringed Plovers** *Charadrius hiaticula* at Sandwich Bay (Kent) on 22nd. The last locality also hosted a **Kentish Plover** *C. alexandrinus* on 11th, as did Jersey on 6th. **Temminck's Stints** *Calidris temminckii* were present at Minsmere

**299.** White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Dorset, August 1986 (David Tipling)



(Suffolk) on 8th to 10th, Titchwell (Norfolk) and Filey Brigg (North Yorkshire) on 26th to 30th. There were a good few American species to be found. **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** *Tryngites subruficollis* were at Sandwich Bay on 5th, Pitsford Reservoir (Northamptonshire) on 9th and 12th, two at Davidstow (Cornwall) on 28th, and the Cley bird (*Brit. Birds* 79: 518) remained until 8th. The

**White-rumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis* at Snettisham (Norfolk) also stayed until 8th, and others of this species were found at Teesmouth (Cleveland) from 7th to 17th, Slimbridge (Gloucestershire) on 21st to 23rd, and in Cornwall. **Semipalmated Sandpipers** *C. pusilla* were obliging at Rye Harbour (East Sussex) from 2nd, Minsmere from 6th to 15th and at Ballycotton (Co. Cork) from 17th to 24th. The Ouse Washes (Cambridgeshire) produced the only report of **Pectoral Sandpiper** *C. melanotos*. Foulridge Reservoir (Lancashire) held a **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularia*, and the **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* in Lincolnshire (*Brit. Birds* 79: 518) was still to be seen on 10th, while another was reported from the Camel Estuary (Cornwall).

Reports of the larger wading species showed no particular movements, except for an influx of **Spotted Crakes** *Porzana porzana*, with arrivals at Teesmouth on 9th, Radipole Lake (Dorset), Fair Isle on 14th and in the Isles of Scilly. A **Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris* was an unusual visitor to Teesmouth from 13th to 23rd. Two **Cranes** *Grus grus* were at Cley on 7th; **Spoonbills** *Platalea leucorodia* stayed at Pitsford Reservoir until 12th, at Minsmere until 9th, at Titchwell, and also dropped in at



Dungeness on 23rd and 24th; a **White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia* was at Acle (Norfolk) on 23rd; and **Little Egrets** *Egretta garzetta* were to be found at Cliffe (Kent) and Potteric Carr (South Yorkshire) on 4th.

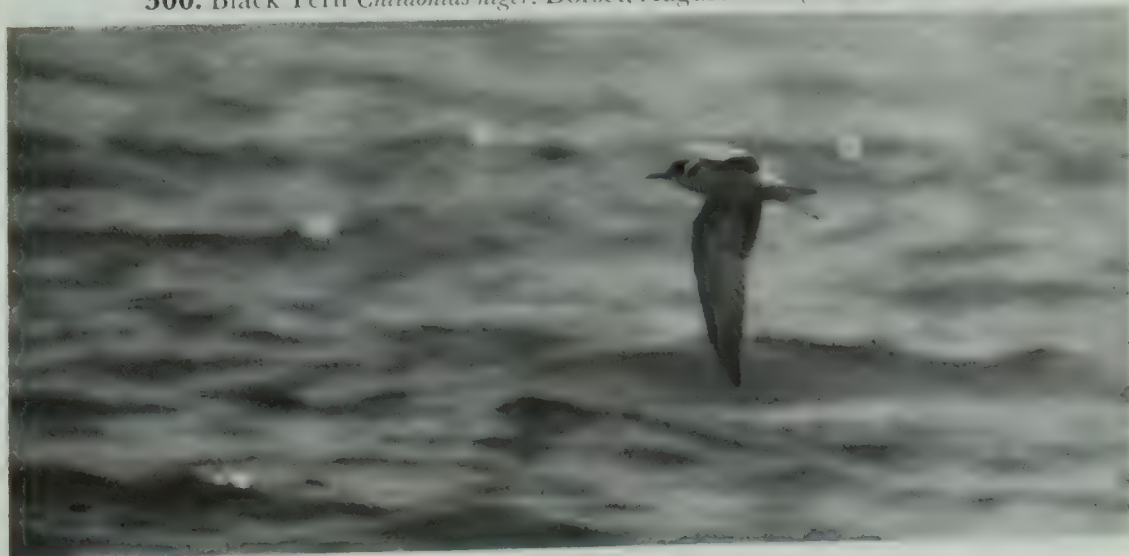
### Birds of prey

The variety of species seen was not very great, but included sightings of **Black Kite** *Milvus migrans* at Rottingdean (Kent) on 22nd followed by one at East Soar Cove (Devon) on 29th, at Heacham (Norfolk) and in the Isles of Scilly, both on 31st. A **Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* arrived from the sea at Benacre (Suffolk) on 17th, and there were four reports of **Ospreys** *Pandion haliaetus*, one staying at Minsmere from 24th to 30th.

### Skuas, gulls and terns

It was a good month for reports of **Long-tailed Skuas** *Stercorarius longicaudus*: 17 in all, mainly from the North Sea coast, but the maximum single count was off Cornwall, with five at Pendeen on 26th. **Pomarine Skuas** *S. pomarinus* were also found along the English east coast, with ten counted at Hartlepool on 26th, and a storm-blown **Great Skua** *S. skua* was a surprise visitor inland at Ixworth (Suffolk) on 29th. A **Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* at Dungeness

300. Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*. Dorset, August 1986 (P. R. Boardman)





on 8th and an older record of a **Ring-billed Gull** *L. delawarensis* on 16th July at Sandwich Bay were the only Nearctic species reported. Three **Mediterranean Gulls** *L. melanocephalus* were found at Tynemouth and three others were noted on the British east coast. **Little Gulls** *L. minutus* and **Black Terns** *Chlidonias niger* (plate 300) visited many inland waters during the month, and a few **White-winged Black Terns** *C. leucop-terus* were also seen, mainly at the coastal sites, Radipole Lake, Dungeness, Cley and Christchurch (Dorset) (plate 299), but also inland at Thrapston (Northamptonshire). A belated report was of a **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* at Sandwich Bay on 16th July.

### Pelagic birdwatchers

Successful sorties into the Western Approaches of the English Channel managed to find the elusive **Wilson's Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus*, so rarely blown inshore. From the West Country came this report: 'The first of two Cornish pelagic trips left Falmouth on

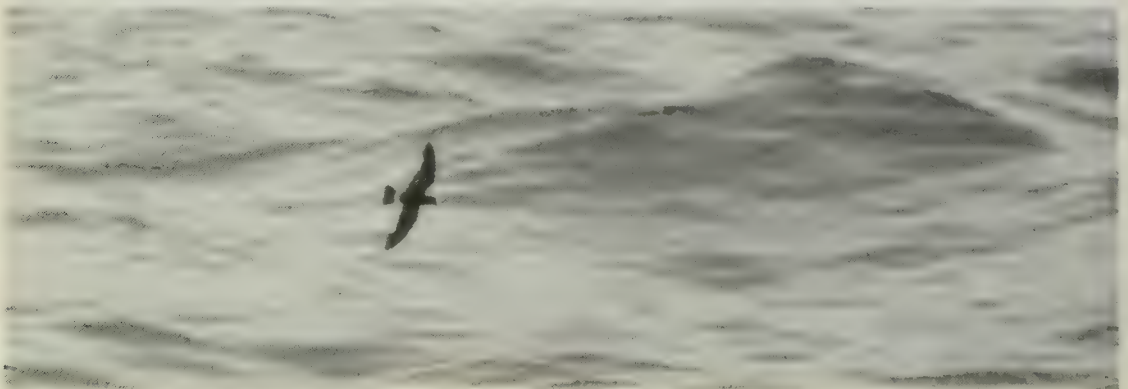
9th August. Despite being dogged by almost nil visibility and east or northeast winds, they found a Wilson's Petrel, the twelfth British record, 54 miles (86 km) WSW of the Bishop Rock Lighthouse (Isles of Scilly) on 10th August. Three days later, the second Cornish pelagic trip, also led and organised by Peter Harrison, returned to the same area at dawn. Working a 40-mile (65-km) triangular course and chumming (spreading fish oil on the surface) at about 10-mile (16-km) intervals, a staggering total of seven Wilson's Petrels was seen. Other highlights of the trip were 12 **Great Shearwaters** *Puffinus gravis* and an adult **Sabine's Gull** *Larus sabini*.'

From Ireland, another boat trip found nine **Wilson's Petrels** 65 miles (100 km) southwest of Mizen Head (Co. Cork) (plate 302), together with about 700 **Storm Petrels** *Hydrobates pelagicus*, 300 **Great Shearwaters** (plate 301), 80 **Sooty Shearwaters** *Puffinus griseus* and two **Cory's Shearwaters** *Calonectris diomedea*. Landlubbers were not entirely 'gripped', however; the storm on 26th brought inshore two **Wilson's Petrels**



**301.** Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis* with Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* off Co. Cork, August 1986 (Steve Rooke)

**302.** Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* off Co. Cork, August 1986 (Steve Rooke)



and three **Sabine's Gulls** at St Ives (Cornwall), and 4,000 **Storm Petrels** (plates 303 & 304), a **Great Shearwater** and another **Sabine's Gull** at Pendeen (Cornwall). In the North Sea, the maximum count of **Sooty Shearwaters** was 68 at Filey Brigg on 19th, and on the same day a **Cory's Shearwater** was seen at Whitburn (Tyne & Wear), while on 18th at nearby Tynemouth a **Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis* was reported. Farther north, off Fair Isle, **Fulmars** *Fulmarus glacialis* were moving north at the rate of 1,900 per hour on 27th, and in Irish waters a **Black-browed Albatross** *Diomedea melanophrys* could be found at Inishglora (Co. Mayo) on 12th and 14th; and, mid way across, from the Rosslare (Co. Wexford) to Fishguard (Dyfed) ferry, a **White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* was observed on 28th.

#### Latest news

Mid October is usually very busy, with large movements and many rarities. This year, however, it was rather slack, although there were many **Yellow-browed Warblers** *Phylloscopus inornatus*, mainly on the English east coast from Newcastle to Norfolk, but west to Scilly and Cape Clear Island, and one inland at Upton Warren (Worcestershire). The only major rarities were **Red-eyed Vireo** *Vireo olivaceus* at Dungeness (Kent), **Rose-Breasted Grosbeak** *Pheucticus ludovicianus*, **Radde's Warbler** *Phylloscopus schwarzi* and **Bonelli's Warbler** *P. bonelli* in Scilly, **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus* at Nanquidno (Cornwall) and five **Glossy Ibises** *Plegadis falcinellus* on the Hayle estuary (also Cornwall).



303 & 304. Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*, Cornwall, August 1986 (P. Wheeler)





# Monthly marathon

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The bird in the second photograph (*Brit. Birds* 79: 418, plate 223) was identified by competition entrants as follows:

Brambling <i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	(87%)
Chaffinch <i>F. coelebs</i>	(6%)
Siskin <i>Carduelis spinus</i>	(2%)
House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	(2%)
Canary Islands Chaffinch <i>F. teydea</i>	(1%)



There were also a small number of entries naming it as Spanish Sparrow *P. hispaniolensis*, Canary *Serinus canaria*, Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguinea*, Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator* and Evening Grosbeak *Hesperiphona vespertina*.

A couple of entrants obviously thought that we might be up to all sorts of underhand tricks, for they identified the bird as a Brambling × Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* hybrid and a Brambling × Chaffinch hybrid; we promise never to be that devious (although *any* species in the 1984 edition of *The 'British Birds' List of Birds of the Western Palearctic* is fair game).

It was indeed a Brambling, photographed by J. B. & S. Bottomley in Lancashire in March 1963.

So far, there are 418 subscribers who have got both of the first two answers right. We think that numbers three and four (*Brit. Birds* 79: 468, plate 262; 520, plate 268) were a bit harder, but we shall see . . . We aim to make sure that the winner of the SUNBIRD holiday fully deserves his or her prize!

If you have failed on this (or the previous one), please do not give up. The winning sequence of ten-in-a-row may well prove not to be numbers 1 to 10, so it is worthwhile continuing to enter each month. Looking ahead at the photographs for the coming few months, we think that the winner will probably need a bit of luck (as well as skill).

Please remember to send your entry *on a postcard*, and do not forget to put your *name and address* as well as your answer.

**305.** 'Monthly marathon' competition. Photograph number 5. Identify this species. If you succeed with ten in a row, you could win a SUNBIRD holiday to North America, Africa or Southeast Asia (see rules on page 364 in July issue). Send your answer *on a postcard* to Monthly Marathon, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ to arrive by 15th December 1986.



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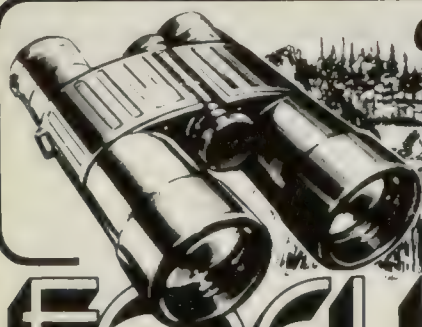
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
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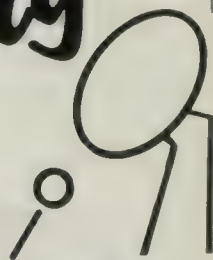
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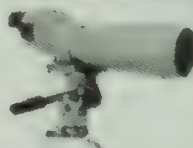
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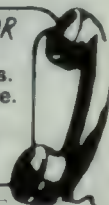
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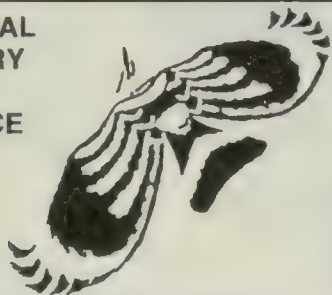
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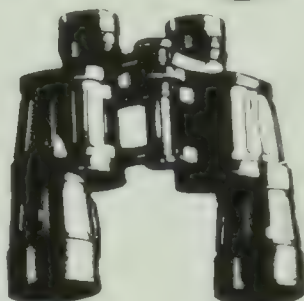
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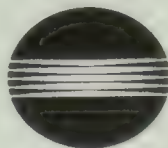
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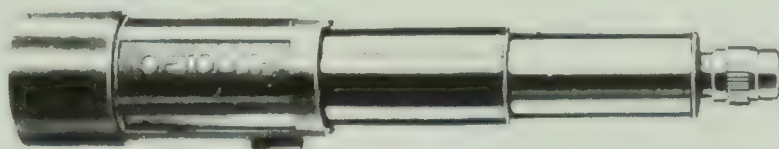


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Volume 79 Number 12 December 1986



Four problem stints  
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Birds in winter

Laurel Anne Tucker (1951-1986)

Mystery photographs · Points of view · Notes · Diary dates  
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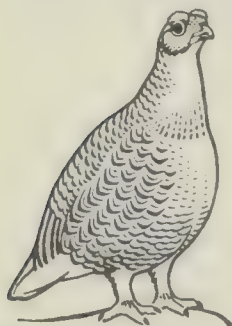
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*Publishing Manager,  
Production & Promotion*  
**Dr J. T. R. Sharrock**

*Circulation Manager*  
**Erika Sharrock**

*Design*  
**Deborah Cartwright**

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## Addresses

Please keep correspondence on different items separate. Please address your envelope correctly. Please supply SAE, if reply required.

*Papers, notes, letters, drawings & photographs for publication* **Dr J. T. R. Sharrock**, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ

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*Bird news for 'Recent reports'* **Ian Dawson & Keith Allsopp**, c/o RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL. *Phone* (outside office hours): Huntingdon (0480) 214186

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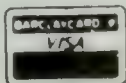
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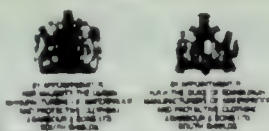


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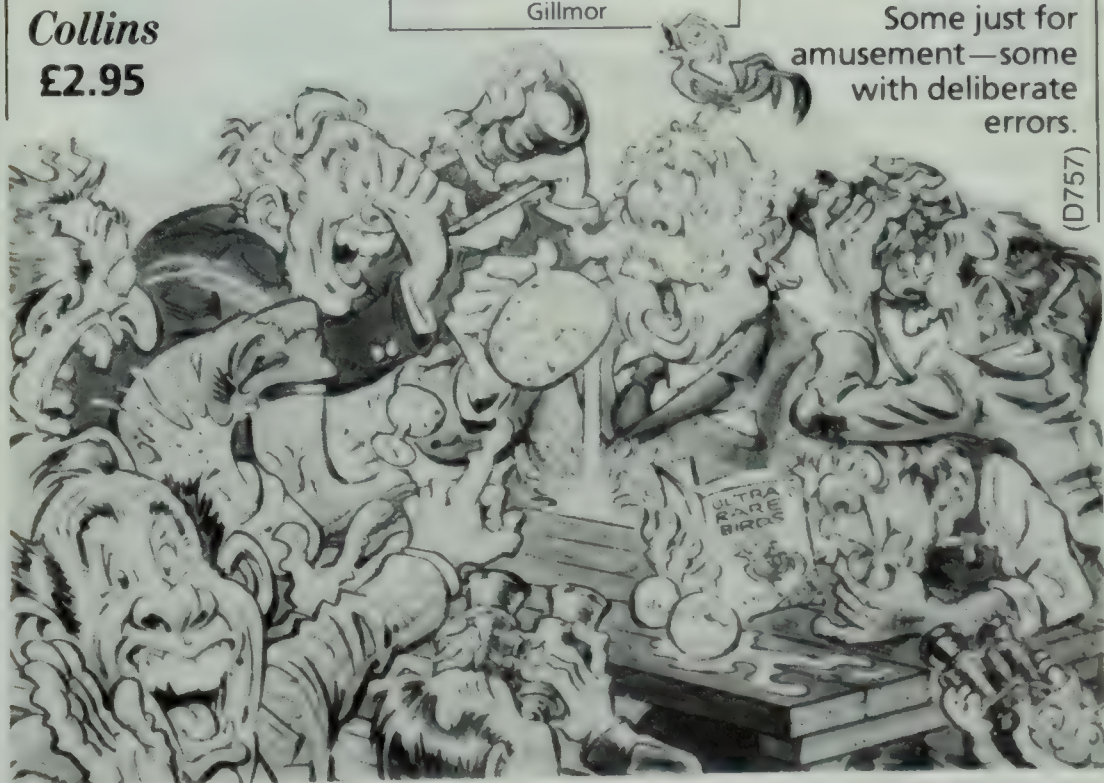
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# British Birds

VOLUME 79 NUMBER 12 DECEMBER 1986



## Four problem stints

*P. J. Grant*

**T**his paper discusses four records of stints *Calidris*, the identification of which has been much debated. All demonstrate the advances which have been made in recent years, especially including the publication of Lars Jonsson's stint paintings (Jonsson & Grant 1984). Reference to that paper will be useful when considering the records described here, as many of the identification points are illustrated and more fully described therein.

Several important lessons can be learned from these case histories. The last three in particular demonstrate some of the major pitfalls and difficulties occasionally involved in stint identification, and the high degree of care necessary with some problem stints. Also well demonstrated is the importance to the identification process of good photographic evidence, and it is again urged that positive steps be taken to obtain a representative series of photographs (preferably colour transparencies) when a rare stint is suspected or identified. (Naturally, such steps should always have due regard for bird, habitat and other observers.)

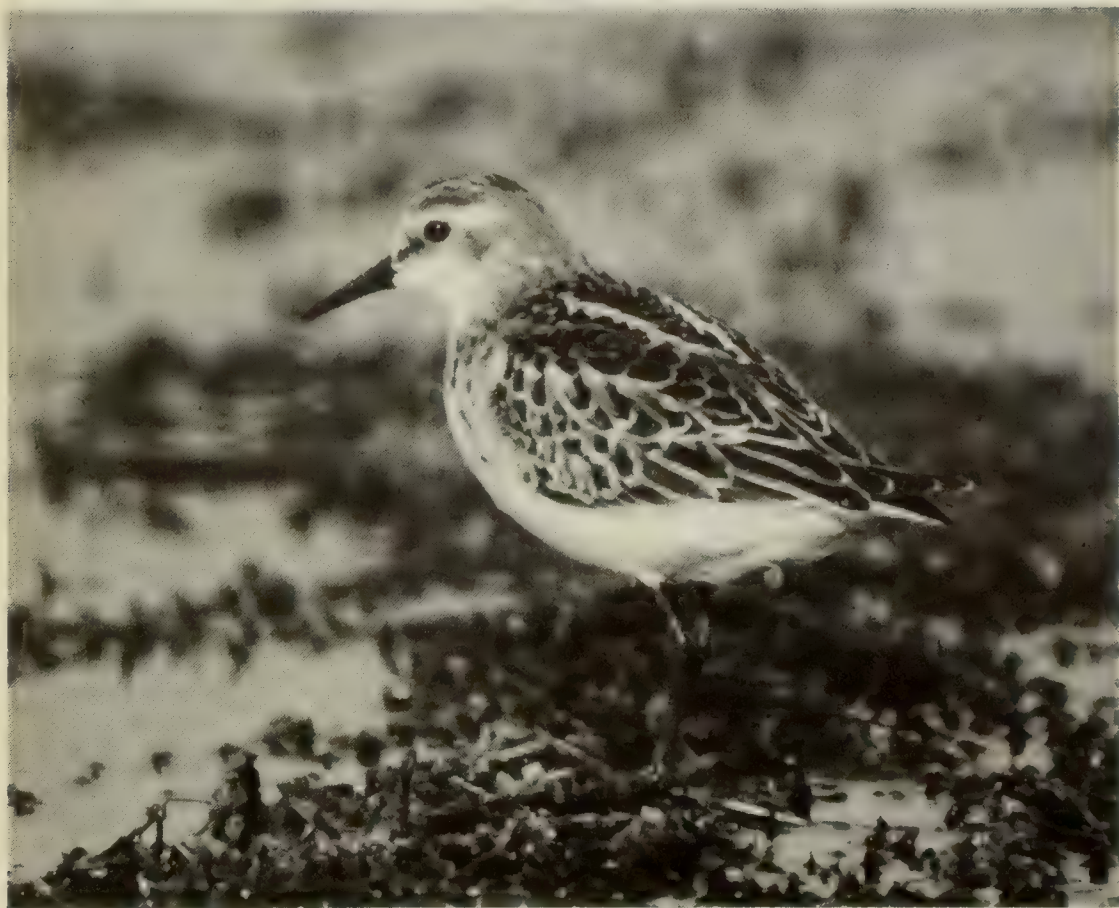
### **1. Dungeness, Kent, 6th to 9th September 1965**

The identity of this bird has been discussed in detail already (*Brit. Birds* 59: 543-547, plate 79; 72: 264-275, plates 127-129). It is again portrayed here (plate 306). It was originally identified as a Baird's Sandpiper *C. bairdii*, but





**306.** Juvenile stint *Calidris* (left), now identified as Little Stint *C. minuta*, with Dunlin *C. alpina*, Dungeness, Kent, September 1965 (*Pamela Harrison*). To facilitate easy comparisons, several photographs (this one and also plates 312, 317-319, 321 & 323) have—at the specific request of the author—been reversed left to right, so that all the relevant birds are facing in the same direction



**307.** Juvenile Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, Kent, September 1979 (*R. J. Chandler*)

accepted by the *British Birds* Rarities Committee (BBRC) as a Semi-palmated Sandpiper *C. pusilla* (59: 289). This decision was withdrawn in 1979, when it was described as 'probably either Little *C. minuta* or Red-necked Stint *C. ruficollis*' (72: 266). The fact that it can now be firmly identified as a juvenile Little Stint (and that any 'lurking doubts' that it

may have been a juvenile Red-necked can be dismissed) is clear evidence of recent advances, especially in the identification of the previously little-known Red-necked. Identification of this individual is now actually rather straightforward. It shows the classic features of a juvenile Little:

1. Fine-tipped bill with very slightly decurved lower mandible (bill of Red-necked averages shorter, straighter and blunter-tipped).
2. Prominent split-supercilium and dark central 'ridge' on crown (whole crown of Red-necked usually rather uniform).
3. Obvious white mantle V (usually faint or lacking on Red-necked).
4. All scapulars, wing-coverts and tertials 'matching', showing blackish centres and neat pale fringes (on Red-necked, only the upper scapulars have blackish centres, and there is thus contrast between these feathers and the plainer, greyer lower scapulars, wing-coverts and tertials).
5. Dark streaking on the breast-side forms an isolated patch (streaking on Red-necked more extensive and more diffuse).
6. Shape normal for Little Stint, lacking typical Red-necked's long-bodied, short-legged outline.

Semipalmated Sandpiper was also excluded for similar reasons, and one photograph clearly showed unwebbed toes, as previously noted (72: 265).

## 2. Covenham Reservoir, Lincolnshire, 7th to 19th September 1974

This previously unidentified and very 'different-looking' stint (plates 308 & 309) has, not surprisingly, prompted much speculation. In 1979, it was reported to have 'provoked a range of opinions' within the BBRC, and was labelled 'stint, perhaps Red-necked, but identity still uncertain' (72: 264-274, plates 141-143). Judging only by its plumage features, it is clearly another juvenile Little and certainly not Red-necked: it has all the classic features, as described above for the Dungeness individual, and colour photographs also show very strong rufous fringes on the tertials and wing-coverts which Red-necked would never show in such strength of colour. Again, better knowledge, especially of juvenile Red-necked, is the key to this identification.

- 308.** Juvenile stint *Calidris*, now identified as Little Stint *C. minuta*, Covenham Reservoir, Lincolnshire, September 1974 (*Keith Atkin*)







309. Juvenile stint *Calidris*, now identified as Little Stint *C. minuta*, Covenham Reservoir, Lincolnshire, September 1974 (*Keith Atkin*)



310. Juvenile Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*, Japan, September 1983 (*T. Shiota*)

In other ways, however, this bird is undeniably odd. The bill is long and rather straight (nonetheless still closer in shape to Little than to Red-necked), and the body looks peculiarly long. Unlike normal Little Stints, its tail projected slightly beyond the wing-tip, and careful field observations over long periods clearly showed that it was 10-15% larger than accompanying Little Stints (K. Atkin *in litt.*), although 'size-illusion' may have exaggerated its large size in some photographs, as discussed



**311.** Juvenile Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, Alaska, USA, September 1983 (Gerald Maisel)

previously (76: 327-334; 77: 323-325). It fed steadily, without the usual dashing activity of Little Stint, and its call was lower-pitched and slightly slurred compared with Little's usual high-pitched, sharp 'stitt' note (K. Atkin *in litt.*). It was probably just an extremely large, long-billed female Little Stint, but there remains a possibility of some other explanation for its unusual appearance.

### **3. Fair Isle, Shetland, 11th to 13th August 1982**

This remarkable-looking 'stint' in worn adult-summer plumage (plates 312-315) was submitted to the BBRC as Britain and Ireland's first Red-necked Stint. On its first circulation, it was unanimously accepted, although seven of BBRC's ten members called for a confirmatory check of this little-known plumage against museum specimens or by an independent expert. Accordingly, the descriptions and the two photographs then available to the BBRC (plates 312 & 313) were sent for comment to Lars Jonsson, who was then working on the illustrations for the forthcoming stint identification paper. His opinion, later unanimously endorsed by the observers and the BBRC, was stunning: not a stint at all, but a Sanderling *C. alba*! The following is a summary of the main pro-Sanderling points from Lars Jonsson's very thorough analysis:

1. Whitish area on ear-coverts below eye (never shown by Red-necked).
2. Colour on chin, throat and ear-coverts (at least in the photographs) rather too orange-toned (not the 'brick-red' of classic Red-necked).
3. Fine, dark streaking on throat and ear-coverts (always unmarked, uniform brick-red on Red-necked).
4. Mantle and scapulars strongly chequered black-and-white (Red-necked has white-fringed upperparts feathers in fresh summer plumage after the spring moult, but these fringes quickly disappear through wear: in moderately-worn summer plumage, upperparts of Red-necked would be strongly rufous-fringed).





**312 & 313.** Adult summer Sanderling *Calidris alba*, originally identified as Red-necked Stint *C. ruficollis*, Fair Isle, August 1982 (James Dickson)



5. In plate 312, scapular (A) has a prominent central white spot; one or two greater coverts (B), a median covert (C) and a lesser covert (D) all have pale areas within the dark centres of the feathers; and the tertials (E) show a broader pale area near the tip: all these are features never shown by any adult summer stint, on which any 'summer-coloured' feathers would be solidly dark-centred.



**314 & 315.** Adult summer Sanderling *Calidris alba*, originally identified as Red-necked Stint *C. ruficollis*, Fair Isle, August 1982 (*James Dickson*)



6. The dark marks on the breast-side have some orange tones intermixed (breast-side basically white on Red-necked).
7. Some of the breast-side markings are fine, wavy bars (always sharp streaks or arrowhead-shaped marks on Red-necked, never bars).
8. The bill is rather too large and stout for a Red-necked.
9. The moult of the primaries (evident from the primary shaft visible in some photographs) is more advanced than would be expected for Red-necked (according to *BWP* vol. 3, earliest primary moult is August-December), but fits Sanderling (earliest, end July-late October).



Some other considerations are important. One photograph (not included here) clearly shows that the bird has no hind toe, a unique feature of Sanderling amongst the small sandpipers. The bird frequented Fair Isle's stony, short-grassed airstrip, rather unusual habitat for a Sanderling in most parts of Britain (but normal in its breeding areas) and was thus 'out-of-context' to observers familiar with its normal wave-chasing behaviour. It was undoubtedly a small individual (size estimated in the field as about that of a Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* or about 75% that of Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* which were alongside), but it should be noted that the largest Red-necked in *BWP* vol. 3 has a wing-length of 112 mm, only about 7% smaller than the smallest Sanderling at 120 mm, which could thus easily be mistaken for 'stint-sized' without direct comparison. Worn adult-summer plumage of Sanderling is not a familiar plumage to most observers in Britain, and is quite different from the more familiar fresh summer-plumage of spring migrants (but which provides its own particular pitfalls when out of usual Sanderling habitat). Wear and wing-moult would have reduced the strength of the usually broad, white wing-bar, normally an easy mark of Sanderling. Finally, the call, noted as a quiet 'swit', is compatible with the usual 'twik' of Sanderling.

This experience draws attention to the major pitfall in the identification of an adult summer Red-necked Stint: an out-of-context Sanderling in worn summer plumage. Claudia Wilds (*in litt.*) has pointed out that a less orange (female?) worn adult-summer Sanderling could also be mistaken for a Semipalmated Sandpiper in summer plumage.

**316.** Adult summer Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*, Alaska, USA, June 1985 (Jon Dunn)



**4. Felixstowe, Suffolk, 30th October 1982 to at least 16th April 1983**

This was submitted to the BBRC as a Western Sandpiper *C. mauri*, an identification supported by the vast majority of the hundreds of observers



**317 & 318.** Stint *Calidris* moulting from juvenile to first-winter, accepted as Semipalmated Sandpiper *C. pusilla*, Felixstowe, Suffolk, October 1982 to April 1983, photographed 21st November 1982 (*Tim Loseby*)





who went to see it. After consideration of opinion that it was in fact a Semipalmated Sandpiper (from a minority within the Committee and from three independent consultants: Jon Dunn, Lars Jonsson and Claudia Wilds), it was eventually accepted as such by BBRC on the record's third circulation, with nine votes in favour and one for 'Western or Semipalmated'. In the first few weeks of its stay, it was in almost full juvenile plumage, with the partial post-juvenile moult to first-winter under way. The photographs (plates 317-319) were taken on 21st November, when it had replaced some scapulars (the lowest row of upper scapulars completely) and some crown and mantle feathers for new, grey first-winter ones. This meant that most of the identification-important parts of the juvenile plumage were still present. Webbed toes (clearly noted by many observers and shown in several photographs, but not those published here) immediately narrowed the choice to Western or Semipalmated Sandpiper. The following is a summary of the main points of the pro-Semipalmated case:

1. Bill not too long for an extreme long-billed Semipalmated, perhaps from the longer-billed east-Canadian population (according to *BWP* vol. 3, Semipalmated's bill is variable, from 16.6 to 22.8 mm; Western's from 21.7 to 27.8 mm).
2. Bill shape compatible with that of a long-billed Semipalmated: rather thick for its whole length, with elongated swollen area at end of bill and only slight decurvature. Western's bill typically longer, finer for most of its length towards tip, only a short swollen area (if any) near tip, and more obviously decurved.
3. Crown and ear-coverts rather uniform and dark, giving contrasting pattern and making supercilium more prominent and clear-cut (Western has paler crown-sides and ear-coverts, with pattern thus less contrasting).

**319.** Stint *Calidris* moulting from juvenile to first-winter, accepted as Semipalmated Sandpiper *C. pusilla*. Felixstowe, Suffolk, October 1982 to April 1983, photographed 21st November 1982  
(Tim Loseby)



4. Supercilium faintly grey-streaked over eye, so that white eye-ring complete (not all-white, lacking upper half of eye-ring, as on typical Western).
5. Supercilium rather narrower and clear-cut in front of eye (not broader in front of eye, extending onto forehead-sides, as on Western).
6. Fringes on inner webs of retained juvenile upper scapulars thin and only slightly (if at all) warmer-toned than rest of upperparts (not broader and obviously rich rufous-chestnut as on typical Western).
7. Tips of rear lower scapulars rounded (not rather pointed as on typical Western), and dark anchor-shaped centres to these feathers correspondingly blunt-tipped (not rather pointed as on Western).
8. Breast-side streaking rather thin, diffuse and extensive (slightly thicker, sharper and more restricted on juvenile Western).



**320.** Juvenile Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*, U.S.A., September 1984 (R. J. Chandler)

The differences in head pattern and upper scapulars colour are perhaps the strongest pro-Semipalmated points, but it is recognised by all who have commented on this record that, given the available evidence, there is no single feature which is totally diagnostic for an individual in this stage of moult. All of the features described above are, however, shown by the majority of individuals of each species. For those who accept that it is Semipalmated, therefore, it is the composite case provided by the combination of all these 'majority differences' which is convincing, and strongly so. When a difficult or atypical individual is involved, the 'total





321. Juvenile Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*, USA, September 1983 (Thomas H. Davis)

image' of all its subtle or overlapping field marks is likely to be of immediate identification value only to observers intimately familiar with it and its one or more confusion-species. For other observers, as ever with tricky identification problems, an objective assessment of the full range of features is much more likely to succeed, rather than assessments of only one or two of the striking features, or of general impressions of shape or behaviour. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the three consultants and all North American stint enthusiasts who have seen photographs of this bird are agreed that it 'looks much more like Semipalmated than Western.' All are also agreed that it is a rather difficult individual. It should be noted that opinions on the flight call were totally divided, some observers (with

322. Juvenile Semipalmated Sandpipers *Calidris pusilla*, New Jersey, USA, September 1983 (R. G. Brown)





323. Juvenile Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*, British Columbia, Canada, August 1979  
(Pamela Harrison)

experience of both species) stating that it called like Semipalmated, others (with similar experience) that it was like Western.

Debate over the identification of this individual will doubtless continue, hopefully aided by the reasons given here for acceptance as Semipalmated. Naturally, it is hoped that the BBRC's carefully considered decision was correct, and that it will become more widely endorsed among the many observers who studied the bird during its stay. It should be stressed, however, that (as with all rarity decisions), this case is not closed, and the BBRC will always review the record on receipt of a considered, contrary case.

### Acknowledgments

I thank Keith Atkin, James Dickson, Jon Dunn, Chris Powell, Nick Riddiford, D. B. Rosair, Dr J. T. R. Sharrock, Claudia Wilds and David Willis for their helpful comments on a first draft of this paper. Notes and photographs in the BBRC files have been essential to the discussions summarised here, and I thank those who submitted them. Special thanks must go to those photographers whose work forms such a vital part of this paper. Finally, I thank all those stint enthusiasts, not all named above, who have at various times discussed these problem individuals: I hope that what is written here is a reasonable distillation of all their views.

### Summary

The problematic identification of four individual stints *Calidris* (Kent in 1965, Lincolnshire in 1974, Shetland in 1982 and Suffolk in 1983) is discussed. The identification of each bird is explained, demonstrating the recent advances in identification techniques for stints, the need for careful analysis of all the features of any problem bird, and the value to the identification process of good photographs.

### Reference

- JONSSON, L., & GRANT, P. J. 1984. Identification of stints and peeps. *Brit. Birds* 77: 293-315.  
P. J. Grant, 14 Heathfield Road, Ashford, Kent TN24 8QD



# Overseas bird tours survey

*J. T. R. Sharrock  
and Lorna Sharrock*



## **Readers' opinions, based on 515 foreign trips with over 60 travel companies to 57 different countries**

**F**ollowing previous surveys of our readers' opinions of binoculars & telescopes (*Brit. Birds* 71: 429-439; 76: 155-161; 78: 167-175) and of coats & jackets for birdwatchers (*Brit. Birds* 79: 198-202), we have now turned our attention to overseas bird tours. From a small handful of companies specialising in such tours 20 years ago, there is now a very wide range, with new companies entering this field every year. This was exemplified by our survey, in which we received details of trips made by *British Birds* readers with over 60 different companies. Anyone contemplating joining an organised birding trip abroad clearly now faces a difficult choice. The increase in the number of companies does, of course, merely reflect the growing market. Many birdwatchers now choose to take their foreign trips in groups led by competent ornithological leaders who know the country and its birds, including the exact habitat for each local species, with all the worry of travel and accommodation arrangements being made by experienced travel operators. At one time, accompanying such an organised trip was, to a certain extent, looked down upon by 'real birdwatchers', whose foreign trips were rough-it, on-a-shoestring, three-man or four-man expeditions based on one overloaded car. This attitude ended, perhaps, when birdwatchers' horizons extended beyond southern Europe and North Africa, to areas south of the Sahara and east of Suez which had to be reached by air. Nowadays, even the most 'macho' and experienced birders feel no embarrassment at joining an organised trip, since in some countries, such as the USSR and China, this is often the only means of access to remote areas. There are now bird tour companies which cater for the expert birder, and even for world-list twitchers, as well as for the average birdwatcher, who usually wishes to have an enjoyable holiday with some good birds in good company, without the worries associated with independent travel in remote places.

The readers of *British Birds* must provide a very good cross-section of the sort of people who go on organised bird tours. Anyone with a level of interest below that represented by the contents of *British Birds* is fairly unlikely to want to spend ten days or more concentrating on looking at birds. There are

general wildlife holidays and trips without ornithological leaders, going to the same areas as bird trips, which cater for the nature-lover with an interest in birds. The assessments made by our readers will be those of average-to-expert birdwatchers. We hope that their assessments will be of great help to those who need to pick and choose from among the many enticing offers made by the plethora of bird tour companies.

Our survey was conducted by means of a two-page pull-out form in the June 1986 issue of *British Birds* (see below). The comprehensive nature of the questionnaire did not deter bird-tour participants from sending in their assessments. A total of over 200 *British Birds* readers sent in a total of 515 completed forms. (Not every question was answered on every questionnaire, so the numbers in the tables in this report do not always total exactly 515.)

## Overseas bird tours survey

If you have participated in a trip organised by a bird tour company, please complete this form and send it before the end of the month to: *Bird tour survey*, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK43 8NJ.

Number of bird tours in which you have participated

Please fill in, below, details of the most recent tour in which you have participated during 1976-86 (if you have accompanied more than one, please use additional photocopies of this form or blank sheet(s) to supply details of all those in which you have participated).

Destination (country or countries)

Dates Month  Year  Length of trip  days

Name of tour company

Were the company's travel arrangements  Excellent  Very good  Good  Adequate  Poor  Very poor

(We are asking you to assess the arrangements made by the company, and not the standard available in the country. Some good bird areas have only poor-quality roads, or unreliable drivers, or poor accommodation. It is the performance of the travel company in making appropriate arrangements that we ask you to comment upon.)

Were the company's accommodation arrangements  Excellent  Very good  Good  Adequate  Poor  Very poor

Do you consider that the company's choice of areas visited included a representative selection of the region's habitats, and gave a satisfactory bird list?  Yes  No

Including any couriers and leaders, how many people were in your group?

For enjoyable birdwatching, was the size of the group  Too large  Acceptable  Perfect  Excellent

Did an ornithological tour leader accompany the group?  Yes  No  
(If more than one ornithological leader accompanied the group, please enter number here )

Would you rate the leader's\* ornithological ability as (income)  Excellent  Very good  Good  Adequate  Poor  Very poor

Was the leader's\* ability to cope in a crisis (income)  Excellent  Very good  Good  Adequate  Poor  Very poor

Were the leader's\* efforts to be flexible, and to ensure that the whole group enjoyed the trip (income)  Excellent  Very good  Good  Adequate  Poor  Very poor

\*We guarantee not to try to identify the individual leaders; we are assessing whether the tour companies choose appropriate leaders, not whether individual leaders were good or bad.

Taking into account possible faults in a leader\*, such as selfishness when a good bird was found or unwillingness to organise early starts on the one hand or excessive zeal on the other, did you personally find the leader's general attitude  Excellent  Very good  Good  Adequate  Poor  Very poor

Did you find the leader\*  Excellent  Very good  Good  Adequate  Poor  Very poor

Did a courier (dealing with administrative arrangements, also a company's tour\*)  Yes  No  
(If the ornithological leader acted as courier, please answer 'No' to this question.)

Would you rate the courier's services  Excellent  Very good  Good  Adequate  Poor  Very poor

Was it helpful to have a courier present  Yes  No

As a whole, would you personally rate the trip as  Excellent  Very good  Good  Adequate  Poor  Very poor

In 'value for money' terms, was it  Excellent  Very good  Good  Adequate  Poor  Very poor

Was the written advice and other information supplied before the tour  Excellent  Very good  Good  Adequate  Poor  Very poor

Do you think that the advantages of joining this bird tour group outweighed any disadvantages (compared with visiting the same region independently)?  Yes  No

Do you plan to join another bird tour at some time in the future?  Yes  No

If 'Yes', and the bird tour company which you named above were to run the appropriate tour, would you choose to book with them again?  Yes  Perhaps  No

If you are currently saving money and holiday time in order to join another bird tour, which country do you plan to visit next

Unless you wish to remain anonymous, please give your NAME and ADDRESS and PHONE NUMBER (to be used in the event of a query, but will NOT be published, nor revealed to anyone other than *British Birds* editorial staff).

Name
Address
Phone no.

Please return this form to Bird tour survey, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK43 8NJ.

Although over 60 bird tour companies were represented by completed questionnaires, 89% of the forms related to 16 companies, and it is these which will be dealt with in detail in this report. Although we did receive completed questionnaires relating to a number of foreign-based companies, we feel that it would be unfair to them and to our readers to feature them in our tables. Clearly, a company based in the USA or in West Germany is likely to be tailoring its requirements largely for North American participants or West German participants, and the opinion of a relatively small number of British birdwatchers who have joined these groups would not necessarily reflect the service being provided by the company. We must,



however, point out that three USA-based companies were very highly rated by *British Birds* readers: BIRD BONANZAS INC., based in Florida, VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS INC., based in Texas, and WINGS INC., based in Maine, the last-named of which is linked with the British company, SUNBIRD.

The ‘big five’ companies, with 70% of *British Birds* readers’ participation shared between them, were ORNITHOLIDAYS (33%), BIRDQUEST (13%), SUNBIRD (9%), CYGNUS WILDLIFE (9%) and PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS (6%). These five are shown in bold type in each table.

**The tour-participating habit**

We asked respondents to note the number of bird tours in which they had participated. On average, those who returned questionnaires had taken part in 5.25 organised overseas bird tours. The average did, however, vary very much from one company to another. The most experienced bird-tour participants were those with the North American company BIRD BONANZAS (12 tours), with the individually led TOM GULLICK trips (ten) and the British-based COX & KINGS (nine) close behind. There can, of course, be at least two reasons behind this. First, those who ‘really know about bird tours’ may choose to go with the best, which they have learnt by experience; secondly, it may be that the sort of birdwatcher who particularly enjoys birdwatching in groups rather than singly chooses to go with relaxed companies which provide a general holiday with some bird-watching, rather than hectic, bird-seeking trips. The companies with the participants with least experience of accompanying bird tours were BRANTA TRAVEL and the FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL (three tours) and BIRDQUEST (four). Here, again, there can be two explanations: first, that anyone with experience of bird tours tends to avoid these companies; secondly, that the company may specialise in the sort of tours which attract birdwatchers who would normally not accompany a bird tour but are particularly attracted to the trips offered by this company. We have

**Table 1. Average number of bird tours in which participants have taken part**

Company	Av. no. tours
BRANTA TRAVEL LTD	2.8
FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	3.3
<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>3.7</b>
IBIS TOURS	4.4
<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>4.9</b>
<b>PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS AT TOWN AND GOWN TRAVEL</b>	<b>5.0</b>
<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS</b>	<b>5.1</b>
<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>5.2</b>
TWICKERS WORLD	5.3
BIRDING	5.8
CHRIS L. SLADE	6.0
SWAN HELLENIC	6.2
RSPB HOLIDAYS	6.3
CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	6.8
COX & KINGS SPECIAL INTEREST HOLIDAYS	9.3
TOM GULLICK	10.0
All others	6.1

detailed these possibilities, since it is necessary to bear them in mind when interpreting the figures shown in table 1. This will, however, show you whether you are likely to have companions who regularly go on bird tours, or whether you are likely to be mostly with newcomers to the bird-tour experience: it's 'new boys' with BRANTA TRAVEL and 'old hands' with TOM GULLICK, but that does not necessarily reflect ornithological experience, merely the regularity of the habit of birdwatching with an organised bird tour.

### **Length of trip**

Examination of the brochures produced by each company would, of course, reveal the length of each trip which they advertise. More relevant to this survey, however, is the distribution of lengths of trips undertaken by those who replied to the questionnaire. This is summarised in table 2, which shows, for instance, that some tour operators, such as BRANTA TRAVEL and TOM GULLICK, specialise in short trips of a week or less, whereas others concentrate on providing longer trips; the average length of a BIRDQUEST trip, for instance, is nearly three weeks. Other firms, such as SUNBIRD, provide a range of holidays, from one-week and two-week trips to longer ones on occasions. The long-established firm ORNITHOLIDAYS clearly concentrates on two-week trips.

**Table 2. Length of trip in days**

Company	Days				Av. days
	<7	7-13	14-20	>20	
BRANTA TRAVEL	5	0	0	0	3.2
TOM GULLICK	2	2	0	0	6.5
BIRDING	6	11	1	0	6.6
RSPB HOLIDAYS	0	16	2	0	8.4
IBIS TOURS	5	4	3	1	8.7
<b>PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10.3</b>
CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	0	7	3	0	10.5
FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	2	0	3	0	10.6
COX & KINGS	1	2	4	0	11.4
TWICKERS WORLD	1	0	3	0	12.0
<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13.3</b>
<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>14.4</b>
CHRIS L. SLADE	0	1	7	1	15.2
<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16.8</b>
SWAN HELLENIC	0	0	4	2	17.8
<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>19.2</b>
All others	8	12	29	2	12.9

These figures need to be borne in mind when assessing the companies' other qualities, since a participant is obviously less concerned with hiccups in the arrangements if these occur once in a three-day trip, but would be very annoyed to find delays or bad connections in travel arrangements or poor-quality hotels once every three days on a 25-day trip. Similarly, a leader who does not provide flexibility in the ornithological arrangements to suit every participant could be tolerated on a short trip, even by those who would find this quite unacceptable on a long, expensive trip lasting three weeks.



The range of countries visited was, in almost every case, very extensive. The exceptions were the operators specialising in short trips: the reports for BRANTA TRAVEL trips which we received related solely to Denmark, France and the Netherlands, and the TOM GULLICK trips are all in Spain. The ‘top countries’ for the various other companies probably depend more on chance than anything else, with relatively small samples, but it may be of interest to note those for the ‘big five’: PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS (The Gambia and Turkey), SUNBIRD (Spain, Mallorca, Israel and Turkey), ORNITHOLIDAYS (Austria, Spain and Mallorca), CYGNUS WILD-LIFE (India and the USA) and BIRDQUEST (the USSR and Kenya). In all, the 515 questionnaires related to visits to a total of 57 different countries.

Travel arrangements

One of the main reasons why birdwatchers choose to go abroad with a bird tour is, of course, the convenience of having all the travel and accommodation arrangements provided as a package. On the ideal trip, the participant will hardly notice that travel arrangements have been made, and certainly will not appreciate the trouble to which the company has gone to ensure the smooth running of the arrangements. It is only on the occasional bad trip that one can really appreciate the advance work necessary to ensure a trouble-free trip. Although the sample is small, it is noteworthy that every participant in a SWAN HELLENIC trip regarded the company’s travel arrangements as ‘Excellent’. It is also particularly noteworthy that the ‘rag, tag and bobtail’ of mostly small companies for which we received few forms (combined as ‘All others’ in the tables) achieved a ‘very good’ rating. More-or-less whoever you decide to book with, the travel arrangements are likely to be pretty good. Top-rated of the ‘big five’ was SUNBIRD, closely followed by BIRDQUEST (table 3).

Table 3. Participants’ assessments of each company’s travel arrangements  
Excellent = 6, Very good =5, Good = 4, Adequate = 3, Poor = 2, Very poor = 1

Position	Company	Assessments					Average assessment	
		6	5	4	3	2		
1	SWAN HELLENIC	6	.	.	.	.	Excellent	6.00
2	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	4	1	.	.	.	Excellent	5.80
3	TOM GULLICK	3	1	.	.	.	Excellent	5.75
4	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	7	4	.	.	.	Excellent	5.64
5	BIRDING	11	4	3	.	.	Very good	5.44
6	SUNBIRD	30	9	5	3	.	Very good	5.40
7	BIRDQUEST	35	21	5	5	.	Very good	5.30
8	TWICKERS WORLD	2	1	1	.	.	Very good	5.25
9	IBIS TOURS	7	3	2	.	1	Very good	5.15
10	ORNITHOLIDAYS	50	77	30	8	2	Very good	4.96
11	CYGNUS WILDLIFE	15	19	5	4	3	Very good	4.85
12	RSPB HOLIDAYS	4	8	4	2	.	Very good	4.78
13	BRANTA TRAVEL	1	2	1	1	.	Very good	4.60
14	PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS	8	9	9	2	3	Very good	4.55
15	COX & KINGS	.	6	1	.	1	Good	4.38
16	CHRIS L. SLADE	2	1	2	3	1	Good	4.00
	All others	22	22	4	4	2	Very good	5.00

Accommodation arrangements

Naturally, we asked those completing the questionnaires to assess the company's choice of accommodation from that available in the area, rather than to assess the standard available in the country or area visited. Most birdwatchers do not wish to stay in de luxe hotels when they are arriving back from field trips in muddy boots. Nevertheless, a reasonable degree of comfort and the availability of baths or showers is obviously expected even in the remotest areas, unless it is not available and the company has warned participants of the fact in advance. Clearly, perhaps even more than any other aspect of a foreign trip, 'you get what you pay for'. Some people probably prefer to have low-quality accommodation, together with the low price with which it would be associated. Bearing this in mind, it is nevertheless noticeable that SWAN HELLENIC again tops the table, with all six completed questionnaires rating its accommodation arrangements as 'Excellent', followed by TOM GULLICK and TWICKERS WORLD equal second (table 4). Of the 'big five', SUNBIRD is the highest rated, very closely followed by BIRDQUEST.

Table 4. Participants' assessments of each company's accommodation arrangements  
Excellent = 6, Very good = 5, Good = 4, Adequate = 3, Poor = 2, Very poor = 1

Position	Company	Assessments						Average assessment
		6	5	4	3	2	1	
1	SWAN HELLENIC	6	.	.	.	.	.	Excellent 6.00
2=	TOM GULLICK	1	3	.	.	.	.	Very good 5.25
2=	TWICKERS WORLD	2	1	1	.	.	.	Very good 5.25
4	SUNBIRD	21	18	7	2	.	.	Very good 5.21
5	BIRDQUEST	32	21	10	1	1	1	Very good 5.20
6	RSPB HOLIDAYS	6	9	3	.	.	.	Very good 5.17
7	BIRDING	8	5	3	2	.	.	Very good 5.06
8=	COX & KINGS	1	6	1	.	.	.	Very good 5.00
8=	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	2	2	.	1	.	.	Very good 5.00
10	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	4	4	1	2	.	.	Very good 4.91
11	CYGNUS WILDLIFE	10	20	11	2	3	.	Very good 4.70
12	ORNITHOLIDAYS	38	62	42	24	2	.	Very good 4.65
13	IBIS TOURS	4	2	3	4	.	.	Good 4.46
14	PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS	6	8	11	4	2	.	Good 4.39
15	BRANTA TRAVEL	.	2	2	1	.	.	Good 4.20
16	CHRIS L. SLADE	.	.	3	1	3	2	Adequate 2.56
	All others	16	18	11	7	3	.	Very good 4.67

Areas visited

Participants were asked to assess whether the company's itinerary had included a representative sample of the region's habitats, so that the trip produced a satisfactory total of bird species seen. Obviously, anyone visiting Mallorca would be somewhat disappointed not to be taken to areas where Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda* and Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii* could be found, to give just one example. The majority of participants were very satisfied in this respect, and no less than nine companies achieved a 100% record, with no participant dissatisfied (table 5). Of the 'big five', BIRDQUEST, SUNBIRD and CYGNUS WILDLIFE all achieved this top ranking.



**Table 5. Participants' assessments of whether trip visited a representative selection of the region's habitats to provide a satisfactory bird list**

Position	Company			%
		Yes	No	Yes
1=	<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>66</b>	.	<b>100%</b>
1=	<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>48</b>	.	<b>100%</b>
1=	<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE</b>	<b>46</b>	.	<b>100%</b>
1=	BIRDING	18	.	100%
1=	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	11	.	100%
1=	BRANTA TRAVEL	5	.	100%
1=	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	5	.	100%
1=	TOM GULLICK	4	.	100%
1=	TWICKERS WORLD	4	.	100%
10	<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>97%</b>
11	RSPB HOLIDAYS	17	1	94%
12	COX & KINGS	7	1	88%
13	<b>PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>87%</b>
14	IBIS TOURS	11	2	85%
15	CHRIS L. SLADE	7	2	78%
16	SWAN HELLENIC	4	2	67%
	All others	52	2	96%

**Group size**

The average number of people on a trip varies enormously from one company to another. TOM GULLICK, with personally accompanied trips in Spain, has four or five people on each trip, whereas there is an average of over 20 participants on the overseas trips organised by PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS, RSPB HOLIDAYS and SWAN HELLENIC (table 6). In general, the larger the group the lower the price per participant, since there will often be group discounts available and cheap forms of travel (the per-head cost in a coach is less than the per-head cost in a smaller vehicle). Some people may prefer to be part of a larger group, because of the chances of meeting like-minded companions. There is also the advantage in a large group that one awkward person can be avoided, whereas within a small group such a person could ruin the trip for everyone. In some instances, a large group can be a positive advantage: in desert country, for instance, a large group can be organised to spread out into a long line which is an effective means of covering a large area where the density of birds is low. On the other hand, a large group travelling by coach may find it difficult to ensure that everyone sees birds spotted during journeys (the last few people out of the coach will almost inevitably be a matter of minutes too late to see something which was watched quite well by the first people who piled out). In other habitats, however, especially tropical forests, very small group size is essential, where there are narrow jungle trails and the need, because of shy species, for silence. Thus, while a group of 16 or more may be acceptable in a country such as Morocco or Israel, a group of ten or less is the optimum in, say, Thailand. In general, however, most participants in bird tours prefer to find themselves in a relatively small group, rather than a large crowd. Of the 'big five', the groups going with SUNBIRD are generally the smallest (an average of 11

**Table 6. Average number of people (including leaders) on each trip**

Company	Av. no. people
TOM GULLICK	4.8
BRANTA TRAVEL	5.8
TWICKERS WORLD	7.0
CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	7.3
CHRIS L. SLADE	7.6
COX & KINGS	9.6
<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>11.2</b>
FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	12.8
BIRDING	13.7
IBIS TOURS	13.8
<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE</b>	<b>15.0</b>
<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>15.2</b>
<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>19.4</b>
<b>PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS</b>	<b>22.7</b>
RSPB HOLIDAYS	23.6
SWAN HELLENIC	23.8
All others	13.8

people), followed by CYGNUS WILDLIFE and BIRDQUEST (both 15 people) (table 6).

Appreciating the need for manageable groups during birdwatching, and that participants often wish to consult the leader about identification or other problems, and learn from him or her, the most responsible bird tour companies ensure that there is more than one ornithological leader with any large group. This has the benefit that the group can, on occasions, split into two smaller groups, each with an experienced ornithological leader, but the whole party gains by having the reduced prices associated with a large group travelling together. Nevertheless, the expense of having more than one ornithological leader with a large group has to be borne by the participants, so it is cheaper to be with a large group with only one leader. It is apparent when comparing the average number of participants per leader with the average number of people on each trip (table 7 and table 6) that some companies generally choose to concentrate on the ornithological service provided by having more than one leader, whereas others opt for providing the cheapest possible tour for their clients. Among the 'big five', SUNBIRD has the best participant-to-leader ratio (less than seven), with BIRDQUEST and CYGNUS WILDLIFE (both around eight) next best.

With different group sizes being the most appropriate for different habitats and different travel arrangements, it is perhaps most meaningful to take the assessment of the participants themselves (table 8). Six companies achieved the top rating of 'Perfect': TOM GULLICK, TWICKERS WORLD, BRANTA TRAVEL, CHRIS L. SLADE, CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE and THE FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL. Of the 'big five', only SUNBIRD can feel happy with the results of its tour participants' ratings, with most considering the group size as 'Perfect' and only one person rating it as less than acceptable. The other four of the 'big five' companies should be worried that, of the 16 tour operators specified in our



Table 7. Average number of participants per leader on each trip

Company	Av. no. participants per leader
TOM GULLICK	3.8
TWICKERS WORLD	4.6
BRANTA TRAVEL	4.8
CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	6.4
<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>6.6</b>
CHRIS L. SLADE	7.3
<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>7.8</b>
<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE</b>	<b>8.1</b>
COX & KINGS	8.6
IBIS TOURS	9.6
FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	9.7
BIRDING	9.8
<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>14.3</b>
<b>PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS</b>	<b>19.0</b>
RSPB HOLIDAYS	20.2
SWAN HELLENIC	22.8
All others	9.9

tables, they come 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th. Perhaps slightly smaller groups should be considered by them (despite the inevitably slightly higher prices which would result). Table 8 should also give considerable food for thought for RSPB HOLIDAYS, which organises overseas bird trips largely—we imagine—as a service to its members, rather than as a means of making money. Of all our 16 main tour operators analysed, only RSPB HOLIDAYS has participants who, on average, found their group tour sizes too large to be acceptable. As some guidance, one can compare tables 6, 7

Table 8. Participants' opinions of tour group size

To determine the average, 'Perfect' was rated as 4, 'Acceptable' as 3, and both 'Too large' and 'Too small' as 1

Position	Company	Perfect	Accept- able	Too large	Too small	Average rating	
1=	TOM GULLICK	4	.	.	.	Perfect	4.00
1=	TWICKERS WORLD	4	.	.	.	Perfect	4.00
3	BRANTA TRAVEL	4	1	.	.	Perfect	3.80
4	CHRIS L. SLADE	7	2	.	.	Perfect	3.78
5	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	7	4	.	.	Perfect	3.64
6	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	3	2	.	.	Perfect	3.60
<b>7</b>	<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>1</b>	.	<b>Acceptable</b>	<b>3.48</b>
8	BIRDING	8	10	.	.	Acceptable	3.44
9	SWAN HELLENIC	3	2	1	.	Acceptable	3.17
10	COX & KINGS	3	4	.	1	Acceptable	3.13
11	IBIS TOURS	5	6	2	.	Acceptable	3.08
<b>12</b>	<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>8</b>	.	<b>Acceptable</b>	<b>2.98</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Acceptable</b>	<b>2.87</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>39</b>	.	<b>Acceptable</b>	<b>2.69</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>8</b>	.	<b>Acceptable</b>	<b>2.58</b>
16	RSPB HOLIDAYS	1	11	6	.	Unacceptable	2.39
	All others	25	23	6	1	Acceptable	3.20

and 8 to discover that, on average, a group size of five to 13 people, with four to ten people per leader, results in very satisfied participants (the top six companies in table 8). In contrast, the bottom six companies in table 8 had an average of 14 to 24 people in each group, with an average ratio of between eight and 20 participants to each leader.

Leader’s ornithological ability

Anyone going on an overseas bird tour should, we believe, have the right to expect that the leader accompanying the tour is an experienced ornithologist, with a thorough knowledge of the birds which are likely to be seen and, for that matter, of the country to be visited. Some bird tour companies recognise this fact and employ (either under permanent contract or on an occasional freelance basis) experienced tour leaders who have visited the country concerned on at least one and probably several previous occasions. Other companies, largely for financial reasons, use leaders who are not paid for providing this service, but are merely given a free or reduced-price holiday. It seems likely that, in general, the professional leader is not only more likely to know the birds thoroughly, but also will be more inclined to ensure that those accompanying him see them well and enjoy the trip. The leader whose recompense for his services is merely a free (or cheap) trip for himself, is perhaps more likely to want to look at the birds which interest *him*, and may be less concerned with ensuring that those accompanying him obtain good views, or see the birds which *they* particularly wish to find on the trip. A paid leader does, however, come more expensive, and tours accompanied by professional leaders will in general be more expensive for the participants. Nevertheless, in both cases, every tour participant should surely end his or her trip with a high regard for the leader’s ornithological ability. Regrettably, this is not always the case (table 9).

Table 9. Participants’ assessments of leader’s ornithological ability

Excellent = 6, Very good = 5, Good = 4, Adequate = 3, Poor = 2, Very poor = 1

Posi- tion	Company	Assessment						Average assessment	
		6	5	4	3	2	1		
1	BIRDING	17	1	.	.	.	.	Excellent	5.94
2	BIRDQUEST	54	11	1	.	.	.	Excellent	5.81
3	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	4	1	.	.	.	.	Excellent	5.80
4	SUNBIRD	37	9	2	.	.	.	Excellent	5.73
5	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	8	2	1	.	.	.	Excellent	5.64
6	CYGNUS WILDLIFE	30	12	3	1	.	.	Excellent	5.54
7	BRANTA TRAVEL	2	3	.	.	.	.	Very good	5.40
8	TOM GULLICK	1	3	.	.	.	.	Very good	5.25
9	ORNITHOLIDAYS	79	57	19	8	3	2	Very good	5.16
10	IBIS TOURS	6	3	3	1	.	.	Very good	5.08
11	TWICKERS WORLD	2	.	2	.	.	.	Very good	5.00
12	RSPB HOLIDAYS	4	10	3	1	.	.	Very good	4.94
13	COX & KINGS	1	6	.	1	.	.	Very good	4.88
14	SWAN HELLENIC	2	2	1	1	.	.	Very good	4.83
15	PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS	12	6	7	4	1	.	Very good	4.80
16	CHRIS L. SLADE	.	.	.	2	3	4	Poor	1.78
	All others	32	12	5	4	2	.	Very good	5.24



The top-rated company, BIRDING, does have trips led solely by this small company's originator. Of the 'big five', BIRDQUEST leads the rankings, with SUNBIRD not far behind, followed by CYGNUS WILDLIFE, all, on average, rated as 'Excellent'.

Coping in a crisis

There are all sorts of things which can go wrong on a bird trip. Some can be anticipated by the tour operator, of course, but there is still always the possibility of sickness or injury to a member of the party, or the failure of transport (either to arrive in the first place, or to be serviceable when it does arrive), which is a minor problem in Britain, but can become serious on a trip 'in the middle of nowhere'. In jungle country, or even in the desert, it is surprisingly easy for someone to become separated from the party and to become lost, even if they subsequently turn up 30 km away, casually sipping a 'g & t' in the hotel bar (yes, it *has* happened!), the leader needs to know what to do. Natural disasters, from snowdrifts or landslides blocking intended roads to inclement weather preventing good birdwatching, and man-made ones, such as airline strikes, lost luggage or overbooked hotels, all need a cool head, particularly in the back of beyond, where options are many fewer. There are, of course, the major crises, which make newspaper headlines, but every leader will be coping almost daily with a series of minor mishaps which, if he is a good leader, the participants will not even know occurred. Since one of the purposes of going on an escorted and organised overseas bird trip is to avoid hassle (to use a currently popular word), every participant ought to be able to feel that the person in charge could cope with any sort of crisis if it occurred. It is not just ornithological knowledge or the ability to get on with people which make a good ornithological tour leader! In fact, 6% of those who returned questionnaires commented that they were unable to assess their leader's ability to cope in a crisis, since there had

Table 10. Participants' assessments of leader's ability to cope in a crisis

Excellent = 6, Very good = 5, Good = 4, Adequate = 3, Poor = 2, Very poor = 1

Position	Company	Assessment						Average assessment	
		6	5	4	3	2	1		
1	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	4	1	.	.	.	.	Excellent	5.80
2	BIRDING	13	4	.	.	.	.	Excellent	5.76
3=	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	5	5	.	.	.	.	Excellent	5.50
3=	BRANTA TRAVEL	1	1	.	.	.	.	Excellent	5.50
5	SUNBIRD	27	13	2	2	1	.	Very good	5.40
6	SWAN HELLENIC	3	2	1	.	.	.	Very good	5.33
7	BIRDQUEST	30	20	6	8	.	.	Very good	5.13
8	TOM GULLICK	1	2	1	.	.	.	Very good	5.00
9	CYGNUS WILDLIFE	18	15	5	6	2	.	Very good	4.89
10	ORNITHOLIDAYS	46	63	34	11	2	1	Very good	4.87
11	TWICKERS WORLD	1	1	1	1	.	.	Very good	4.50
12	IBIS TOURS	3	2	3	4	.	.	Good	4.33
13	RSPB HOLIDAYS	1	4	11	1	.	.	Good	4.29
14	PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS	2	9	2	8	2	1	Good	3.92
15	COX & KINGS	.	3	1	1	.	1	Good	3.83
16	CHRIS L. SLADE	.	2	3	1	1	2	Adequate	3.22
	All others	22	17	7	7	1	1	Very good	4.89

been none. The assessments made by the remaining 94% of respondents (table 10) show that, in general, participants had considerable confidence in their leaders. The FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL, closely followed by BIRDING, head the table, with CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE and BRANTA TRAVEL also rated as 'Excellent', and the leader among the 'big five' being SUNBIRD.

Leader's flexibility

It is the responsibility of the leader of any tour to try to ensure that every member of the group enjoys the trip. On bird tours, this means that the leader should not concentrate on the requirements of the two or three most fanatical birders in the group, but should also cater for the wishes of those who want to have a relaxed birdwatching holiday. At the same time, he has to try to ensure that the two or three keenest people are also satisfied, and do not feel that the birdwatching pace is too relaxed. With practice, an experienced leader can usually manage this, but it does take a lot of planning, particularly when the keenest members of the group want to stay out in the field (on a mountain 50 km from the hotel base) until dusk, whereas the majority of the party have had enough after, say, eight hours of solid birdwatching and want to return to the hotel for a shower and some relaxation before dinner. It is not easy to keep every member of the party happy all the time, but the leaders for the FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL and for BIRDING were considered to be 'Excellent' in this respect (table 11). Of the 'big five' companies, it is noteworthy that SUNBIRD scored particularly well, with a significantly higher rating than any of its main competitors. ORNITHOLIDAYS was the best of the remaining four.

Table 11. Participants' assessments of leader's efforts to be flexible, and to ensure that the whole group enjoyed the trip  
Excellent = 6, Very good = 5, Good = 4, Adequate = 3, Poor = 2, Very poor = 1

Posi- tion	Company	Assessment						Average assessment	
		6	5	4	3	2	1		
1	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	5	.	.	.	.	.	Excellent	6.00
2	BIRDING	14	4	.	.	.	.	Excellent	5.78
3	BRANTA TRAVEL	2	3	.	.	.	.	Very good	5.40
4	SUNBIRD	27	15	3	1	.	1	Very good	5.38
5	TWICKERS WORLD	3	.	.	1	.	.	Very good	5.25
6	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	4	6	.	1	.	.	Very good	5.18
7=	COX & KINGS	5	1	.	1	1	.	Very good	5.00
7=	TOM GULLICK	3	.	.	.	1	.	Very good	5.00
9	ORNITHOLIDAYS	58	61	28	11	8	2	Very good	4.86
10	SWAN HELLENIC	1	4	.	1	.	.	Very good	4.83
11	BIRDQUEST	23	20	12	6	4	.	Very good	4.80
12	CYGNUS WILDLIFE	16	13	8	3	6	.	Very good	4.65
13	RSPB HOLIDAYS	3	8	4	2	1	.	Very good	4.56
14	IBIS TOURS	5	1	4	2	1	.	Very good	4.54
15	PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS	.	12	5	7	2	4	Good	3.63
16	CHRIS L. SLADE	2	.	3	1	2	1	Good	3.56
	All others	23	16	7	6	3	.	Very good	4.91



Leader’s general attitude

We asked bird tour participants completing our forms to assess the general attitude of their leader ‘taking into account the possible faults, such as selfishness when a good bird was found, or unwillingness to organise early starts on the one hand or excessive zeal on the other.’ The leaders for four companies were regarded as ‘Excellent’ on average in this respect: those for the FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL, BIRDING, TOM GULLICK, and SUNBIRD, the last-named beating the other four ‘big five’ by a large margin (table 12).

In general, the leaders of overseas bird tours seem to strike about the right balance so far as participants are concerned, with seven out of eight

**Table 12. Participants’ assessments of leader’s general attitude**  
Excellent = 6, Very good = 5, Good = 4, Adequate = 3, Poor = 2, Very poor = 1

Position	Company	Assessment						Average assessment
		6	5	4	3	2	1	
1	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	5	.	.	.	.	.	Excellent 6.00
2	BIRDING	15	3	.	.	.	.	Excellent 5.83
3	TOM GULLICK	3	1	.	.	.	.	Excellent 5.75
4	<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	.	<b>1</b>	.	<b>Excellent 5.60</b>
5	BRANTA TRAVEL	3	1	1	.	.	.	Very good 5.40
6	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	4	7	.	.	.	.	Very good 5.36
7	SWAN HELLENIC	2	4	.	.	.	.	Very good 5.33
8	TWICKERS WORLD	2	1	1	.	.	.	Very good 5.25
9	<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Very good 4.98</b>
10	<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	.	<b>Very good 4.98</b>
11	<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Very good 4.96</b>
12	COX & KINGS	3	3	.	2	.	.	Very good 4.88
13	RSPB HOLIDAYS	4	9	2	3	.	.	Very good 4.87
14	IBIS TOURS	4	3	3	3	.	.	Very good 4.62
15	<b>PEREGRINE TOURS</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Good 4.33</b>
16	CHRIS L. SLADE	1	2	1	2	.	2	Good 3.50
	All others	29	9	9	6	2	.	Very good 5.04

**Table 13. Participants’ opinions of the leader’s attitude**

Position	Company	Too fanatical	About right	Too relaxed (or even lazy)	% with poor attitude
1=	BIRDING	.	18	.	0%
1=	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	.	11	.	0%
1=	COX & KINGS	.	8	.	0%
1=	BRANTA TRAVEL	.	5	.	0%
1=	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	.	5	.	0%
1=	TOM GULLICK	.	4	.	0%
7	RSPB HOLIDAYS	.	17	1	5.6%
8	<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9.1%</b>
9	<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10.4%</b>
10	<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14.3%</b>
11	IBIS TOURS	1	11	1	15.4%
12	SWAN HELLENIC	.	5	1	16.7%
13	<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>19.6%</b>
14	<b>PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS</b>	.	<b>24</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>20.0%</b>
15	TWICKERS WORLD	.	3	1	25.0%
16	CHRIS L. SLADE	.	5	3	37.5%
	All others	3	48	4	12.7%

leaders having an attitude considered to be 'About right' (table 13). It may, however, give some companies cause for concern that as high a proportion as one in eight is regarded by people on the tour as being either 'Too fanatical' or 'Too relaxed (or even lazy)'. The leaders for six operators came out very well in this assessment, however, with 'a clean sheet' for BIRDING, CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE, COX & KINGS, BRANTA TRAVEL, FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL, and TOM GULLICK. The top scorers among the 'big five' were BIRDQUEST and SUNBIRD.

### **Couriers**

It is not always easy to define the status of the additional people who sometimes accompany bird tours. They can be genuine couriers, but there are also local guides, interpreters, bus-drivers' assistants, travel company executives taking the opportunity of a free holiday, and so on. The tour operator is likely to know, since some of these people are paid for, and others are not, but the participants may not be aware of this difference. Bearing this in mind, our results show that 34% of the bird tours were accompanied by an additional person, assumed by our respondents to be a courier (table 14). When asked the question 'Was it helpful to have a courier present?', 95% of respondents replied 'Yes'. In general, couriers' services were considered by the participants to be of a good quality: 36% were rated as 'Excellent', 28% as 'Very good', 17% as 'Good' and 13% as 'Satisfactory', with only 5% as 'Poor' and 1% as 'Very poor'. Thus, there must be some preference for choosing a company which does use a courier, since, apart from all else, this will take some of the pressure of day-to-day arrangements away from the ornithological leader, who can then concentrate on the birdwatching side of his responsibilities. On the other hand, the inclusion of a genuine courier will inevitably increase the cost of a tour and increase the

**Table 14. Presence of courier (or other person, in addition to the ornithological leader, dealing with administrative arrangements)**

Company	Courier present		%
	Yes	No	
SWAN HELLENIC	6	.	100%
BRANTA TRAVEL	5	.	100%
<b>PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>94%</b>
IBIS TOURS	9	2	82%
BIRDING	14	4	78%
CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	6	5	55%
<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>17%</b>
COX & KINGS	1	7	13%
CHRIS L. SLADE	1	8	11%
TOM GULLICK	.	4	0%
TWICKERS WORLD	.	4	0%
FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	.	5	0%
RSPB HOLIDAYS	.	17	0%
All others	18	35	34%



price to all of those participating. On trips to some destinations (e.g. China, the USSR), the presence of a courier is compulsory.

For the tours covered by our survey, SWAN HELLENIC and BRANTA TRAVEL always used couriers, whereas TOM GULLICK, TWICKERS WORLD, the FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL and RSPB HOLIDAYS never did. Of the ‘big five’, PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS habitually had a courier accompanying their trips, but the others used a courier on less than half their trips, with SUNBIRD utilising a courier the least, on only one in six of their tours.

The trip as a whole

We have dealt with a number of the aspects of an overseas bird tour which go to contribute towards its success or failure. It is, however, perhaps the assessment of the trip in total which is most important. We asked participants, therefore, to assess the trip as a whole (table 15) and to assess it also in value-for-money terms (table 16). The trip as a whole was regarded as ‘Excellent’ by participants in tours organised by the FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL, BIRDING, TOM GULLICK, CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE and SUNBIRD (table 15). The fact that 77% of all respondents rated their trips as ‘Excellent’ or as ‘Very good’ does show that, on the whole, the bird tour companies are supplying a ‘product’ which is appreciated by and well tailored to the requirements of the birdwatchers who make use of the service. Perhaps this is not altogether surprising, but there are so many birdwatchers that it would perhaps be possible for some companies to continue for some time providing a bad service, used once-only by a steady flow of new clients. It is noteworthy that only two out of 515 completed forms rated any trip as ‘Very poor’.

It may have been a thoroughly enjoyable trip, but was it ‘Value for money’? The FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL and BIRDING both achieve

Table 15. Participants’ rating of the trip as a whole

Excellent = 6, Very good = 5, Good = 4, Adequate = 3, Poor = 2, Very poor = 1

Position	Company	Assessment						Average assessment	
		6	5	4	3	2	1		
1	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	5	.	.	.	.	.	Excellent	6.00
2	BIRDING	16	1	1	.	.	.	Excellent	5.83
3	TOM GULLICK	3	1	.	.	.	.	Excellent	5.76
4	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	7	4	.	.	.	.	Excellent	5.64
5	SUNBIRD	31	14	3	.	.	.	Excellent	5.58
6	BIRDQUEST	39	17	5	3	.	.	Very good	5.44
7	TWICKERS WORLD	1	3	.	.	.	.	Very good	5.25
8	CYGNUS WILDLIFE	19	17	7	3	.	.	Very good	5.13
9	COX & KINGS	4	3	.	.	1	.	Very good	5.13
10	SWAN HELLENIC	3	.	3	.	.	.	Very good	5.00
11	ORNITHOLIDAYS	57	62	33	13	3	.	Very good	4.93
12	RSPB HOLIDAYS	5	7	5	1	.	.	Very good	4.89
13	BRANTA TRAVEL	1	3	.	1	.	.	Very good	4.80
14	PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS	9	13	3	5	1	.	Very good	4.77
15	IBIS TOURS	3	4	5	1	.	.	Very good	4.69
16	CHRIS L. SLADE	3	.	1	2	1	2	Good	3.56
	All others	22	21	9	3	.	.	Very good	5.13

**Table 16. Participants' assessments of the trip in value-for-money terms**  
Excellent = 6, Very good = 5, Good = 4, Adequate = 3, Poor = 2, Very poor = 1

Posi- tion	Company	Assessment						Average assessment
		6	5	4	3	2	1	
1	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	4	1	.	.	.	.	Excellent 5.80
2	BIRDING	13	2	3	.	.	.	Excellent 5.56
3	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	6	4	1	.	.	.	Very good 5.45
4	<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	.	.	<b>Very good 5.25</b>
5=	TOM GULLICK	2	1	.	1	.	.	Very good 5.00
5=	TWICKERS WORLD	1	2	1	.	.	.	Very good 5.00
7	<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	.	.	<b>Very good 4.98</b>
8	<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	.	<b>Very good 4.87</b>
9	<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Very good 4.80</b>
10	IBIS TOURS	4	5	1	3	.	.	Very good 4.77
11	SWAN HELLENIC	1	3	1	1	.	.	Very good 4.67
12	COX & KINGS	2	3	2	.	1	.	Very good 4.63
13	RSPB HOLIDAYS	3	7	6	2	.	.	Very good 4.61
14	<b>PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	.	.	<b>Very good 4.52</b>
15	BRANTA TRAVEL	.	2	2	1	.	.	Good 4.20
16	CHRIS L. SLADE	3	.	2	2	2	.	Good 4.00
	All others	18	24	8	3	2	.	Very good 4.96

the assessment 'Excellent' in this respect, and it is notable that they also topped the table for participants' assessments of the trip as a whole. The 'big five' are in the same order in this value-for-money assessment as in that for the trip as a whole, with SUNBIRD in the lead, and BIRDQUEST, CYGNUS WILDLIFE and ORNITHOLIDAYS next, rated more or less equally.

Pre-tour written advice

It should be the duty of every tour operator to provide the people travelling

**Table 17. Participants' assessments of the written advice and other information supplied before the tour**

Excellent = 6, Very good = 5, Good = 4, Adequate = 3, Poor = 2, Very poor = 1

Posi- tion	Company	Assessment						Average assessment
		6	5	4	3	2	1	
1	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	3	.	1	.	.	.	Excellent 5.50
2	<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	.	.	<b>Very good 5.36</b>
3	<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	.	.	<b>Very good 5.31</b>
4	BIRDING	9	4	5	.	.	.	Very good 5.22
5	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	4	5	.	2	.	.	Very good 5.00
6	IBIS TOURS	4	5	3	1	.	.	Very good 4.92
7	<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	.	<b>Very good 4.92</b>
8	<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	.	.	<b>Very good 4.89</b>
9=	TOM GULLICK	1	1	1	1	.	.	Very good 4.50
9=	TWICKERS WORLD	1	.	3	.	.	.	Very good 4.50
11	<b>PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	.	.	<b>Good 4.45</b>
12	SWAN HELLENIC	2	1	.	3	.	.	Good 4.33
13	BRANTA TRAVEL	.	2	2	1	.	.	Good 4.20
14	COX & KINGS	1	2	2	3	.	.	Good 4.13
15	RSPB HOLIDAYS	2	2	10	1	3	.	Adequate 3.94
16	CHRIS L. SLADE	.	.	5	2	1	1	Adequate 3.22
	All others	13	15	14	9	3	.	Good 4.48



with his company with very full advice on everything from the climate, the weather and currency regulations, to local customs and any special items likely to be needed (e.g. mosquito repellent, warm clothing, sunhat). A detailed itinerary should be provided, and, for a bird tour, a full list of the expected species, and recommendations for pre-tour reading and books to be taken on the trip itself. The highest ratings for the supply of this vital preliminary paperwork were given to the FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL, BIRDQUEST and SUNBIRD (table 17). It is particularly notable that, whereas in every other table the mass of smaller or seldom-used companies covered by our general term 'All others' have earned the relatively high assessment of 'Very good', in table 17 these tour operators earn only the rating of 'Good', which is well below the general average. Presumably, all companies must supply some sort of pre-tour paperwork, so this is a relatively easy and cheap way for all companies to improve their service to their clients. Only the top eight companies can feel any sense of complacency concerning their pre-tour paperwork.

Future plans

The bird tour companies are clearly providing a good service, since 94% of respondents considered that the advantages of joining the bird tour outweighed any disadvantages (table 18) and an even higher percentage (97%) intended to join another bird tour at some time in the future. Five companies achieved a 100% record, with all of their participants feeling that it had been well worth while joining the tour: BIRDING, CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE, the FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL, TOM GULLICK and TWICKERS WORLD. These companies were closely followed by SUNBIRD and BIRDQUEST.

When asked 'Would you book again with this company?', everyone who had accompanied a CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE trip replied 'Yes' (table 19). This 100% record was nearly achieved also by BIRDING, with RSPB

Table 18. Participants' opinions of tour usefulness: 'Did the advantage of joining the tour outweigh any disadvantages?'

Position	Company	Yes	No	% Yes
1=	BIRDING	18	.	100.0%
1=	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	11	.	100.0%
1=	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	5	.	100.0%
1=	TOM GULLICK	4	.	100.0%
1=	TWICKERS WORLD	3	.	100.0%
<b>6</b>	<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>97.9%</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>97.0%</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>95.8%</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>95.7%</b>
10	RSPB HOLIDAYS	17	1	94.4%
11	IBIS TOURS	11	2	84.6%
<b>12</b>	<b>PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>83.9%</b>
13	SWAN HELLENIC	5	1	83.3%
14	BRANTA TRAVEL	4	1	80.0%
15	COX & KINGS	6	2	75.0%
16	CHRIS L. SLADE	5	4	55.6%
	All others	52	3	94.5%

**Table 19. Participants' future booking plans, revealed by answers to the question 'Would you book again with this company?'**

In assessing rating, Yes = 2, Perhaps = 1, No = 0

Position	Company	Yes	Perhaps	No	Average rating
1	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	11	.	.	Yes 2.00
2	BIRDING	17	1	.	Yes 1.94
3	RSPB HOLIDAYS	15	3	.	Yes 1.83
<b>4</b>	<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Yes 1.82</b>
5	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	4	1	.	Yes 1.80
<b>6</b>	<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Yes 1.79</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>10</b>	.	<b>Yes 1.76</b>
8	TOM GULLICK	3	1	.	Yes 1.75
9	COX & KINGS	6	1	1	Yes 1.63
10	BRANTA TRAVEL	3	2	.	Yes 1.60
<b>11</b>	<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Yes 1.58</b>
12	IBIS TOURS	7	5	1	Perhaps 1.46
<b>13</b>	<b>PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Perhaps 1.36</b>
14	TWICKERS WORLD	2	1	1	Perhaps 1.25
15	SWAN HELLENIC	2	1	3	Perhaps 0.83
16	CHRIS L. SLADE	2	2	5	Perhaps 0.67
	All others	32	10	6	Yes 1.54

HOLIDAYS a close third. Of the 'big five', ORNITHOLIDAYS achieved the highest rating, perhaps not surprising with a long-established company which has, over the years, built up a large, well-satisfied clientele. BIRDQUEST and CYGNUS WILDLIFE also did well in this respect. The relatively lowly position of SUNBIRD (11th) is difficult to understand, considering its consistently high position in all the previous assessments.

Respondents stating that they intended to join another bird tour at some time in the future were asked to name the country which they planned to visit next. A total of 64 countries was named, the leading ones being Israel (17), India (17), the USA (15), Spain (12), Kenya (12), Austria (8), Turkey (8), Australia (7), China (7) and Thailand (7).

## Summary

Many considerations will influence a birdwatcher when deciding, first of all, whether to accompany a bird tour or make a trip on his or her own, and, secondly, which tour company to choose. Potential participants will assess the detailed itinerary of the trip, the reputation of the company, the known expertise of the advertised leader, and—by no means least—the price in comparison with other similar tours. We hope that our detailed analysis of our readers' opinions, based on actual trips undertaken, will prove beneficial to everyone contemplating going on an organised bird tour. We also hope that this report will be useful to the bird tour operators themselves, in two ways: our readers' praise of the best tour companies should enhance their reputations (probably already good by word of mouth) still further; and perhaps all bird tour operators will look at the answers given to our questions and learn of ways in which their travel arrangements and choice of leaders could be improved. In general, we feel that the bird tour companies whose businesses have been assessed in this report provide an excellent service for Britain's birdwatchers.



We have no doubt that the many tables in this report will each be carefully perused by potential participants in further bird tours, but, for those wishing a shorter summary, table 20 provides a digest of the information given in tables 3, 4, 9-12, and 15-17. On the criteria given in those tables, the two most highly ranked tour operators are the FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL and BIRDING (both rated as 'Excellent' on average); close behind is SUNBIRD, the top of the 'big five' companies.

As with our previous analyses of our readers' opinions, we must end with the advice that anyone purchasing the product (in this case planning to go on an overseas bird tour) should look around, investigate thoroughly, and eventually choose whatever suits him or her as an individual. We are very aware that an identical trip could be rated by one person as 'Excellent' and by another as 'Very poor', depending upon each person's original expectations.

There are, however, eight companies which, on average, received no assessment worse than 'Very good'. We feel that we can, without reservation, recommend the following companies' overseas bird tours:

(LISTED IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

BIRDING

BIRDQUEST

CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE

CYGNUS WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL

ORNITHOLIDAYS

SUNBIRD

TOM GULLICK



These companies are now entitled to display the 'British Birds' logo within their advertising and other promotional material.

Perhaps we should close this report with the simple message: 'Have a good trip!'

*Dr J. T. R. Sharrock and Lorna Sharrock, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham,  
Bedford MK44 3NJ*

## Appendix 1. Our sample

We appreciate that our survey is not based on a random sample of birdwatchers. *British Birds* readers comprise the most active and experienced birdwatchers, and are therefore likely to cast a very critical eye over any ornithological product. Human nature is such that those who have had a particularly enjoyable trip or a really bad one are probably more likely to have responded to our questionnaire than those who were just content or mildly dissatisfied. We believe, however, that the results of our survey reflect accurately the opinions of typical, knowledgeable birdwatchers, and that they will be a great help to anyone contemplating going on an organised bird tour.

**Table 20. Summary of participants' assessments (giving equal weighting to each of those in tables 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16 & 17)**

Position	Company	Average assessment	
1	FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL	Excellent	5.74
2	BIRDING	Excellent	5.60
<b>3</b>	<b>SUNBIRD</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>5.43</b>
4	CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE	Very good	5.37
5	TOM GULLICK	Very good	5.25
<b>6</b>	<b>BIRDQUEST</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>5.22</b>
7	SWAN HELLENIC	Very good	5.15
8	TWICKERS WORLD	Very good	5.03
<b>9</b>	<b>CYGNUS WILDLIFE</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>4.94</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>ORNITHOLIDAYS</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>4.90</b>
11	BRANTA TRAVEL	Very good	4.86
12	IBIS TOURS	Very good	4.73
13	RSPB HOLIDAYS	Very good	4.66
14	COX & KINGS	Very good	4.65
<b>15</b>	<b>PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>4.37</b>
16	CHRIS L. SLADE	Adequate	3.27
	All others	Very good	4.87

## Appendix 2. Names and addresses of the main 19 bird tour companies

**BIRD BONANZAS INC.** PO Box 611563, North Miami, Florida 33161, USA.

**BIRDING** Lattenden's Farm, Ashburnham, Battle, East Sussex.

**BIRDQUEST** 8 Albert Road East, Hale, Altrincham, Cheshire WA15 9AL.

**BRANTA TRAVEL LTD** 20-24 Uxbridge Street, London W8 8TA.

**CALEDONIAN WILDLIFE** 30 Culduthel Road, Inverness IV2 4AP.

**CHRIS L. SLADE** 8 The Grange, Elmdon Park, Solihull, West Midlands B92 9EL.

**COX & KINGS SPECIAL INTEREST HOLIDAYS** 46 Marshall Street, London W1V 2PA.

**CYGNUS WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS** 96 Fore Street, Kingsbridge, South Devon TQ7 1PY.

**FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL** Overseas Office, Flatford Mill Field Centre, East Bergholt, Colchester, Essex CO7 6UL.

**IBIS TOURS** Clifton Travel Ltd, 4b Waterloo Street, Clifton, Bristol 8.

**ORNITHOLIDAYS** Lawrence G. Holloway, Dept. 2, 1-3 Victoria Drive, Bognor Regis, Sussex PO21 2PW.

**PEREGRINE HOLIDAYS** at Town & Gown Travel, 40/41 South Parade, Summertown, Oxford OX2 7JP.

**RSPB HOLIDAYS** RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

**SUNBIRD** PO Box 76, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 1DF.

**SWAN HELLENIC** Art Treasure Tours, 77 New Oxford Street, London WC1A 1PP.

**TOM GULLICK** c/o Mrs M. C. Parker, 5 Tile Barn Close, Farnborough, Hampshire GU15 8LS.

**TWICKERS WORLD** 22 Church Street, Twickenham TW13NW.

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS INC.** PO Box 33008, Austin, Texas 78764, USA.

**WINGS INC.** PO Box 889, Northeast Harbor, ME 04662, USA.

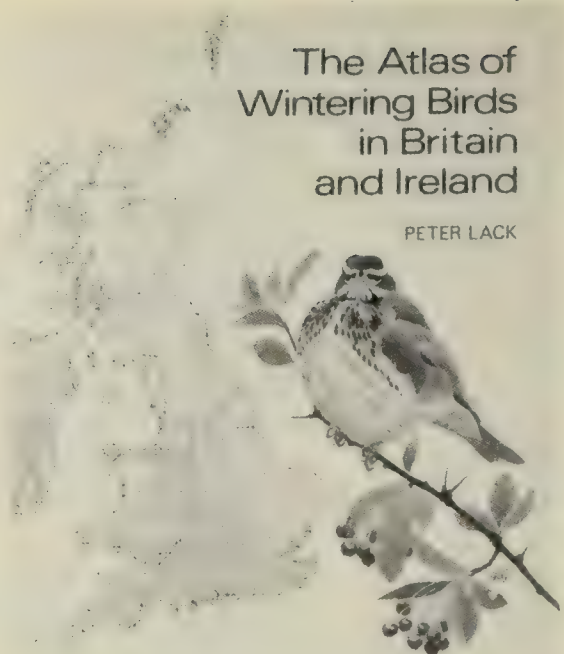
FOOTNOTE We feel that we should draw readers' attention to the fact that one member of the *British Birds* Editorial Board (P. J. Grant) is a director of one of the companies assessed in this report (SUNBIRD), but we wish to state that he was involved in no way in the analysis of the results or the preparation of this report. The assessments shown in the tables are those of the readers of *British Birds*, and the comments on the tables are those of the senior author. EDS



The Atlas of  
Wintering Birds  
in Britain  
and Ireland

PETER LACK

# Birds in winter



British Trust for Ornithology   Irish Wildbird Conservancy

**I**t seems very fitting that we should choose this, the first of the 'real winter months', following the publication of *The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland* in November, to include our long-awaited selection of photographs typifying birds in the European winter. There are close ties between *British Birds* and the two bodies which organised the Winter Atlas Survey, the British Trust for Ornithology and the Irish Wildbird Conservancy, and between *British Birds* and the publishers of the resulting book, T. & A. D. Poyser Ltd, who have made a contribution which subsidises the publication of this feature. We greatly welcome this co-operation.

Certain sights and sounds typify the seasons of the year to an ornithologist. Since they are mostly scattered in isolated pairs in spring and summer, but gather together in mixed congregations in autumn and winter, the twittering and the low, undulating flight of flocks of finches, buntings and sparrows as they move between feeding areas in weedy fields and hedgerows (plates 324-326) is very evocative of that period before the hardest winter weather drives them farther south or to the coast.

Many species change their habits and their habitats between summer and winter. In extreme cases, this is obvious and well known. The more subtle changes are, sometimes, not fully appreciated. It was work for the Winter Atlas project which brought home to many observers the transformation of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers *Dendrocopos minor* from woodland birds to hedgerow birds, for in winter this sparrow-sized woodpecker (plate 327) often becomes loosely associated with the roving flocks of tits *Parus* and Goldcrests *Regulus regulus* which frequent farm hedgerows at a time when dense woodland is almost birdless.

There could be few greater contrasts than that between the lazy days of summer—birding in shorts or shirtsleeves, with the wheezing songs of

---

[This feature has been subsidised by T. & A. D. Poyser Ltd, publishers of *The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1986) Eds]



324. Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus*, Greenfinches *Carduelis chloris*, Goldfinches *C. carduelis*, Linnets *C. cannabina* and Twites *C. flavirostris*, DDR, November 1975 (Günter Rinnhofer)

325. Below left, Twite *Carduelis flavirostris* and Linnet *C. cannabina*, DDR, March 1965 (Günter Rinnhofer)

326. Below right, Twites *Carduelis flavirostris*, DDR, December 1973 (Günter Rinnhofer)







327. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*, DDR, January 1972 (Günter Rinnhofer)

328. Brent Geese *Branta bernicla*, Netherlands, February 1977 (P. Munsterman)





**329.** Female Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*, DDR, December 1973 (Günter Rinnhofer)

**330.** Snipes *Gallinago gallinago*, Co. Cork, January 1977 (Richard T. Mills)







**331.** Male Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*, Greater London, February 1979 (*R. J. Chandler*)

**332.** Redwing *Turdus iliacus*, Cheshire, December 1981 (*Anthony J. Bond*)



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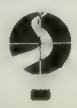
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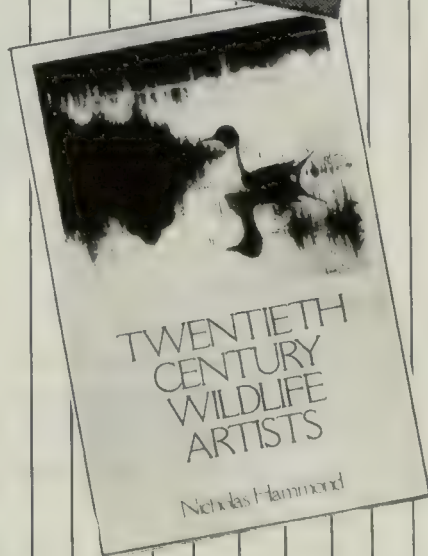
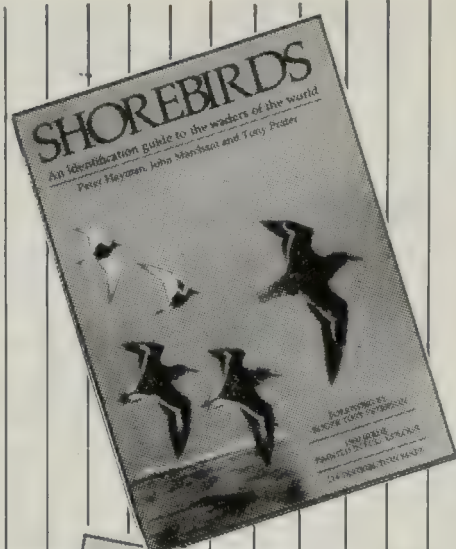
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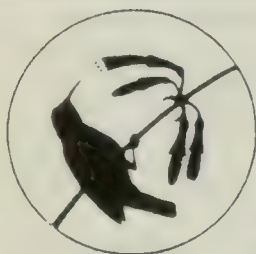
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**333.** Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, Gloucestershire, January 1981 (*Harold E. Grenfell*)

**334.** Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*, Cheshire, February 1985 (*Anthony J. Bond*)







**335.** Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*, Co. Cork, November 1979 (*Richard T. Mills*)

**336.** Tufted Ducks *Aythya fuligula*, Smews *Mergus albellus* and Pochard *A. ferina*, Netherlands, January 1979 (*René Stel*)





**337.** Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria* and Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus*, Somerset, January 1981  
(Robin Williams)

**338.** Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus*, Wigtownshire, December 1980 (Jack Orchel)

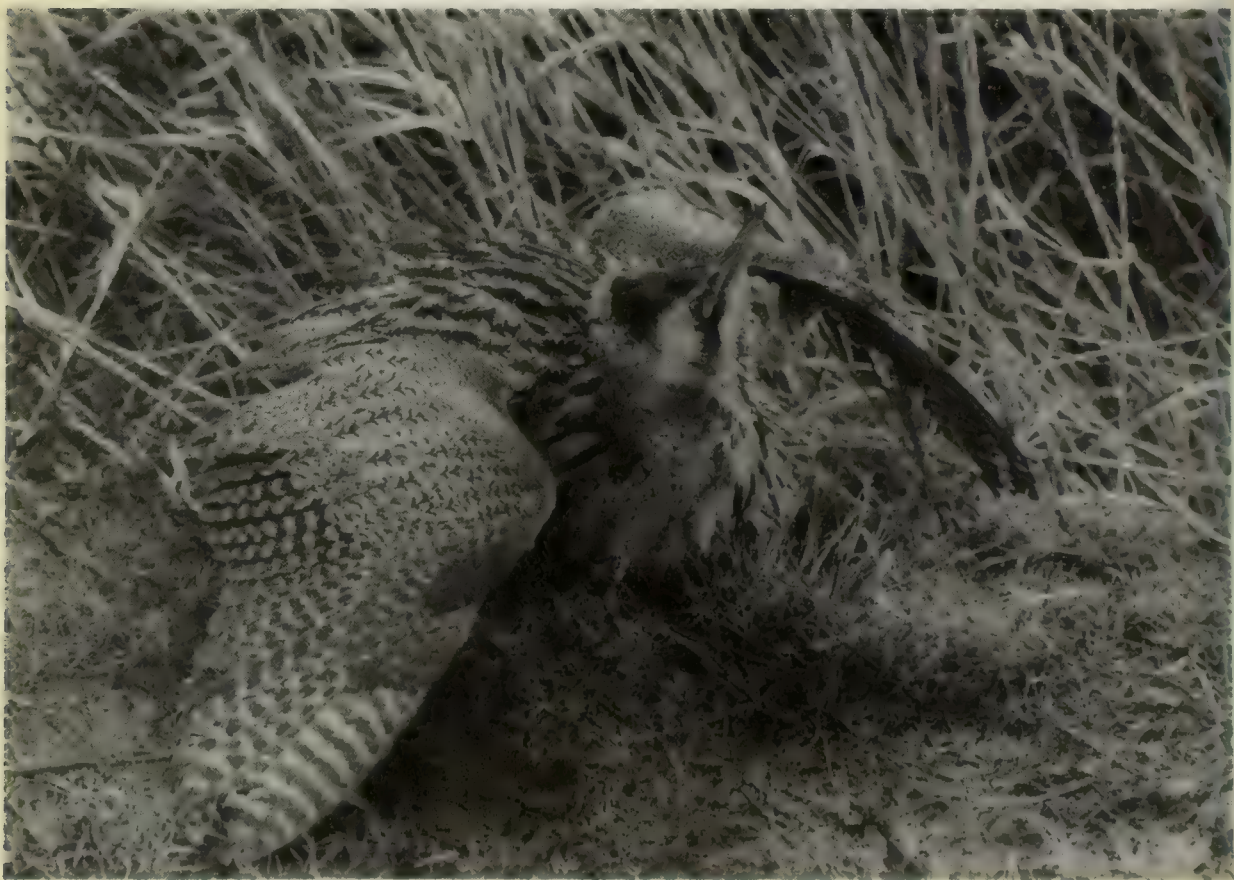






339. Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*, Worcestershire, February 1983 (*M. C. Wilkes*)

340. Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, Lancashire, January 1985 (*Dennis Green*)





Yellowhammers *Emberiza citrinella* on a drowsy summer's day—and the picture presented by the grazing Brent Geese *Branta bernicla* amidst a February blizzard on the marshes (plate 328).

Pretty for us, but deep snow and frozen ground brings a testing time for small birds. The Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* (plate 329), with its bill full of seeds, creates an attractive picture, but also demonstrates how important it is to wildlife that natural vegetation be allowed to remain during the autumn and winter, to provide a continuing source of food sticking above the lying snow.

The words wader or shorebird may in autumn make a birder think of Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*, Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*, or Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*, but in winter it is not the individual rarity but the spectacular flocks of waders which typify the season: Dunlins *Calidris alpina* and Knots *C. canutus* on the coast, but inland the species most often seen is Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* (plate 330), wintering flocks frequenting traditional marshes, flooded meadows and even water-logged ploughland.

Since they breed here only very occasionally, Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla* (plate 331) are very much winter British birds. While one tends to think of them in sizable mixed flocks with Chaffinches *F. coelebs*, feeding on beech-mast, it could well be that the majority of the wintering British population is scattered, one here and another there, for most wintering flocks of mixed finches, sparrows and buntings seem to contain one or two Bramblings if one searches carefully (and it was often not until the fieldwork which led to *The Atlas of Wintering Birds* that this became obvious).

A poll to name *the* winter bird has not been taken, but it seems certain that the two 'winter thrushes', Redwing *Turdus iliacus* (plate 332) and Fieldfare *T. pilaris* (plate 334), would both be near the top. The winner, however—although it is with us all the year—might well be the Robin *Erithacus rubecula* (plate 333): featured more than any other animal on Christmas cards, and, with its melancholy winter song, providing the most typical of all bird sounds on a quiet, crisp day.

Although often taken for granted, the dusk gatherings of Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* (plate 335) supply even members of the general public who normally have no interest in birds with spectacular, attention-attracting aerial displays.

For the birdwatcher, however, there are certain species or sights which are the draw to fieldwork. The beginning of a big freeze-up, with the lakes and flooded gravel-pits almost, but not quite, frozen over, the small areas of open water filled with wildfowl and—hopefully—a diver *Gavia*, rare grebe *Podiceps*, or sawbill *Mergus*: most attractive of all, perhaps, the delicate Smew *M. albellus* (plate 336). In traditional sites—often old established pasture—flocks of Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria* (plate 337) are to be found, and, in favoured areas, flooded fields or unploughed stubble are frequented by flocks of geese or wild swans—Bewick's *Cygnus columbianus* or Whoopers *C. cygnus* (plate 338).

Not only does winter bring birds which we do not see at other times of the



year, but it also creates conditions in which we can see more often—or for longer periods—species which may be present but hidden in other seasons. We may hear Water Rails *Rallus aquaticus* in summer; but we see them in winter (plate 339). While winter weather may sometimes be welcomed by us, for bringing birds to us from far away or out from cover, this is but a reflection of the effects which the cold (and particularly the reduction in food supply which this brings) has upon the birds themselves. The final photograph reflects this forcibly. Hard weather, with frozen water and frozen mud, brings death from starvation to many birds. The Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* (plate 340) is directing its threat display at the photographer who, in other circumstances, would never have been able to get so close; this weakened individual was discovered close beside a second, already dead Bittern.

This small collection of photographs, selected from many submitted to *British Birds* for inclusion in this feature, has, we hope, provided a reflection of birds and birdwatching opportunities in a European winter. The recent publication of *The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland*, giving the results of the BTO/IWC Winter Atlas Survey during the three winters 1981/82, 1982/83 and 1983/84, will further demonstrate to armchair-birdwatchers what they are missing by not getting into the field more often. We recommend both.

J. T. R. SHARROCK and R. J. CHANDLER

## Obituary

### Laurel Anne Tucker (1951-1986)

On 20th June 1986, at the age of 35, Laurel Tucker suffered a cerebral haemorrhage from which she never regained consciousness. The news of her death has shocked all the birders who knew and admired her.

Laurel Tucker (née Cook) was born in Guernsey and it was there that she first discovered a fascination with the natural world as she fastidiously searched the shore pools for wildlife. Laurel was always a perfectionist and even then nothing was done half-heartedly. All her observations were checked and questioned until she was satisfied with their accuracy.

After her marriage to Nigel Tucker, Laurel moved to Bristol and completed a degree course in illustration at the Faculty of Art and Design at Bristol Polytechnic. Membership of the Bristol Ornithological Club provided contact with keen, active birders and a trip with the Tuckers was always exciting and exhausting. When she left college, Laurel's skill as an illustrator developed and her evocative line-drawings enhanced many popular bird books, including *An Atlas of the Birds of the Western Palaearctic*, *BWP* (vol. 5), *Birds New to Britain and Ireland*, *The Big Bird Race* and numbers of this journal. Before long, birdwatchers will marvel at her work in *The Handbook of Bird Identification* by Steve Madge and Mark Beaman. She had



**341.** Laurel Anne Tucker (1951-1986) (*K. E. Vinicombe*)

been working on the plates for this work for many years, covering all the passerines and waterfowl herself and lending her considerable field experience in discussing text details for other species.

In life, Laurel was vivid and intense, and our memories of her have the same clarity and definition as her drawings: Laurel completing 40 field sketches of Garden Warbler at The Coastguards, Portland, then turning up at the pub two hours later and arguing politics until three in the morning; Laurel cooking a crayfish for friends on St Agnes, with the same serious attention to detail which characterised all her work; Laurel at a party, dancing to Bob Marley, with the energy to continue long after everyone else was ready for bed.

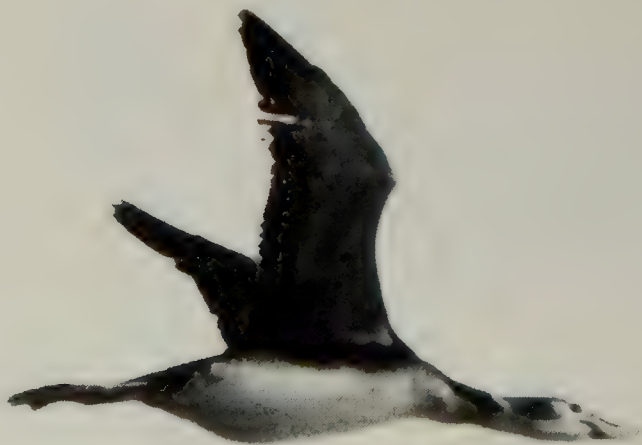
She was the most acute of observers, but was always prepared to consider the opinion of others. Despite the strength of her views, she was an excellent listener. She always wanted to ask about birds: 'Did you think it called like . . . ?' 'Was the wing tip beyond the coverts or not?' In everything she did, she displayed an almost childlike wonder and pleasure and a genuine love of her subjects. She always wanted to know more.

Since 1983, Laurel had begun a new life with Keith Vinicombe, and was enjoying a new challenge, helping to produce an identification book with him. We hope that this can be completed in her memory. To Keith, Nigel, Laurel's parents and her sister, Shelley, we extend our deepest sympathies. For many of us, birding will never be quite the same again. **TIM CLEEVES**



# Mystery photographs

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**120** Last month's mystery bird (plate 298, repeated above) is clearly of substantial proportions, and it would not be unreasonable if, at first glance, it was thought to be a goose. A 'few wing beats more' and the relatively small, pointed wings, elongated body, with feet set far back, dark upperparts, and light underparts make it easily recognisable as a diver *Gavia* in winter plumage.

Identification of divers in flight is a long-recognised problem. The excellent photograph by R. Pop, taken in the Netherlands during February 1979, does, however, make identification possible.

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**343.** Mystery photograph 121. Identify the species. Answer next month

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The dusky sides to the neck, the position of the wings, indicating high up-strokes (and revealing dark flanks), the pale face, and the shape and position of the bill, together present a superficial resemblance to Red-throated Diver *G. stellata* in juvenile plumage.

There are, however, large prominent feet, a large head and bill on a thick muscular neck, which together preclude Red-throated (which shows narrower, less-prominent feet, a relatively small head, a small thin bill and a slender neck, presenting an elegant appearance).

The general bulk, the dark flanks and prominent feet might suggest Black-throated Diver *G. arctica*. The dark areas on the head and neck are, however, not dark nor even enough. On Black-throated, those areas usually reach down to the lower rim of the eye and half-way on to the sides of the neck respectively, forming an even, virtually unbroken line from bill to 'shoulders'. The usually obvious dark flanks connect this along to the tail, presenting an image of 'half-black and half-white'.

Thus, the mystery bird is clearly either a Great Northern Diver *G. immer* or a White-billed Diver *G. adamsii*, the main features being the very large prominent paddle-like feet, creating an image of centrally placed wings, and the large angular head and massive bill on a thick muscular neck, with the latter drooped slightly at the base, accentuating a typical hump-backed appearance. The superficial resemblance to Red-throated prompts one to consider White-billed, and that indeed is what it is.

The photograph shows the classic bill of White-billed, the distal portion being strikingly pale, the virtually straight upper mandible having an almost translucent tip extending fractionally beyond the lower, that in turn being dark at the base, with strongly angled gonys. Typically, the head is being held slightly upwards, accentuating the retroussé effect.

In winter plumage, Great Northern also has a largely pale bill, but on flying individuals it seldom, if ever, looks so strikingly pale and translucent distally as it often appears on White-billed. Very close views are required to discern the precise extent of dark on the bill, which, even on very pale-billed Great Northerns, is always evident along the distal cutting edges and the whole length of the culmen. The head is held similarly in flight, but not to the same degree, the more decurved upper mandible and less angled gonys detracting from any retroussé effect.

Showing well in the photograph are the pale areas around the dark eye, which create a pale-headed appearance that becomes exaggerated in flight. Together with pale areas on the neck-sides, these emphasise an isolated dark patch on the rear ear-coverts, which, although not diagnostic, can be a most useful complementary feature, particularly at long range. Some individuals, however, particularly adults, lack this patch, and in spring some Great Northerns show variable light and dark shades on the head and neck.

A careful look at the neck shows that the dark on the hindneck is restricted, with poorly defined graduated tones on the neck-sides. There is little sharp contrast between the dark hindneck and light foreneck on White-billed, though the broad dark collar at the base of the neck may be



well defined, and on many individuals is almost fused on the foreneck. On Great Northern, the dark hindneck is more extensive, and there is sharper contrast with the white foreneck.

Admittedly, some of the points discussed above are of little use on a flying diver, but yours might settle!

RON H. APPLEBY

38 Tennyson Avenue, Scarborough, North Yorkshire

## Points of view

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Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'

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### 16. The introduction of the Chukar

I am not one of those who disapprove of all introductions on principle. Still less do I subscribe to what was until very recently the 'official' view, in this and in other countries, that it was right to introduce and encourage the introduction of species 'of use for sport', but wrong to do so for aesthetic or scientific reasons. I thoroughly approve of the introduction of beautiful or interesting birds in certain instances. I think, however, that the introduction of the Chukar *Alectoris chukar* (and its hybrids) into England was wrong, because it was, and is, bound either to compete with the Red-legged Partridge *A. rufa* and, if successful, to eliminate it from part or all of its English range, or else to hybridise with it, again with the elimination of the pure stock by hybrids should these prove to be more 'fit' (as they may well do).

All seven species of *Alectoris* are beautiful birds. The Red-legged Partridge is one of the most distinctive: I know I am biased in its favour, but I consider it, together with the desert race of the Chukar *A. c. sinaica*, more beautiful than all its congeners. More importantly, it has a very restricted world range, being found only in southern France, Iberia and a few nearby areas of southern Switzerland and northern Italy; as well as in England, there are, or were, populations on Corsica which were probably, and others on Gran Canaria, Madeira and the Azores which were certainly, introduced. The Chukar, on the other hand, has a very large natural range, from eastern Greece to China, and has been successfully established in the western United States and in New Zealand; it has apparently been introduced also into parts of the natural range of the Rock Partridge *A. graeca*, and hybridised with it there (Nicolai 1982). In England, I have in recent years seen Chukars and hybrids in Kent, and both have been seen also in Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Hampshire.

Clearly, the Red-legged Partridge is under potential threat from the introduction of Chukars and hybrids, both here and in its native haunts, where Chukars have also been introduced; captive stocks in the USA are

similarly threatened (Klan 1984). Continued introductions might easily tip the balance against the pure Red-leg, even if (which seems far from proven) it would otherwise be more successful here.

What can or should be done to try to preserve stocks of pure, or at least relatively pure, Red-legs in England? I certainly do not advocate the killing of Chukars and hybrids currently at large. I would, however, suggest that, where Red-legs are present on land not under the control of sportsmen, the following course should, where feasible, be adopted. If hybrids or Chukars are present, every endeavour should be made to find their nests (except where to do so would result in *serious* disturbance to species at least as threatened as the Red-leg). The eggs should then be replaced with eggs from the nests of pure Red-legs. This will stop the Chukars or hybrids (but not the robbed Red-legs) from laying again, and keep them usefully and happily occupied. As Red-legs and Chukars appear to interact and interbreed freely, the chicks would not be alienated from their own species by imprinting. If it were not possible to replace eggs, then all but three or four of the 'unwanted' eggs should be sterilised. This would probably ensure that not many, if any, of the few resultant chicks would be fully reared.

Of course, any successful action on these lines presupposes an increased interest in gamebirds by birdwatchers.

DEREK GOODWIN

6 Crest View Drive, Petts Wood, Kent BR5 1BY

#### REFERENCES

- KLAN, S. K. 1984. Red-legged Partridge—keeping the species pure. *Game Bird Breeders, Aviculturists, Zoologists and Conservationists' Gazette* June-July 1984. Utah, USA.  
NICOLAI, J. 1982. *Fotoatlas der Vögel*. Munich.

## Notes

**Behaviour of juvenile Baillon's Crake** This note appears on pages 675-677.

**Gait and leg length of Spotted Sandpiper** Between 4th November 1984 and January 1985, a Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* wintered on the Tavy Estuary, Devon, in company with up to four Common Sandpipers *A. hypoleucos* (*Brit. Birds* 78: 551). When I first saw the bird, I was struck by its 'leggy' look in comparison with the Common Sandpipers present. This was also mentioned to me independently by at least three other observers. S. C. Madge mentioned in conversation that he had noted the juvenile at Drift Reservoir, Cornwall, in the autumn of 1983 (*Brit. Birds* 77: 527) to be long-legged. It was puzzling, therefore, to find no reference in the literature to leg length being at all diagnostic of Spotted when compared with Common Sandpiper.





Reference to tarsus measurements in *BWP* was inconclusive, and in fact tended to show that, on average, the tarsi of Common Sandpiper were slightly longer. Perhaps Spotted Sandpiper was longer from the body to the knee? The tibia certainly appeared to show more in the field than on its European relative.

Further careful watching over the next few weeks showed some interesting points. The 'leggy' look of Spotted may, I feel, be something of an illusion, caused by the species' smaller size, rather different stance, and its distinctive gait. At times, the gait was hesitant and plover-like, and the bird even 'hung' its foot occasionally, in typical plover fashion. It was, however, its normal gait whilst feeding—striding out freely—that proved so distinctive. This is shown clearly in photographs by J. E. Seeviour and G. Messenbird in *British Birds* (75: plate 149; 77: plate 241). It was very different from the methodical, rather 'flat-footed' walk of the Common Sandpipers when moving over the same area of mud and shingle. The stride of the Spotted Sandpiper caused the legs to straighten to an extent never seen with the Common Sandpipers: no matter how fast the walk, their legs were always well flexed at the knee.

With practice, this gait distinguished the bird from Common Sandpipers present, even at long range before any structural or plumage differences were apparent.

Although fully aware of the danger of putting too much emphasis on the jizz of just one individual, the gait was so consistent and distinctive throughout its stay that I think it is worth noting for future observers of the species as a possible diagnostic point, to be used in conjunction with the proved features for distinguishing this species from Common Sandpiper already made known in the literature.

ROGER SMALDON

46 Briar Road, Hartley, Plymouth, Devon PL3 5JH

These aspects add to the specific differences in jizz and structure noted by J. A. Kieser (*Brit. Birds* 76: 313-314, plates 134 & 135). Eds

**Black-headed Gull in summer plumage in January** On 16th January 1985, at Chesham, Buckinghamshire, I saw an adult Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* with a full hood. The earliest time of year for which I have found a published record of this species in summer plumage is 16th March (Yarrell, 1837-43, *A History of British Birds*), but P. J. Grant (1982, *Gulls: A Guide to Identification*) stated for adult Black-headed Gull: 'exceptionally [head] with extensive dark markings or even full summer hood in mid-winter'. Close views enabled me to see that the head was not of the deep chocolate-brown seen in spring, but was of a pale brown, more usual in late summer. The bill, legs and feet were dark reddish-brown. Otherwise, the bird had the appearance of normal summer plumage. Had this bird retained its summer plumage, or had it simply undergone a rather early spring moult?

R. B. WILLIAMS

Norfolk House, Western Road, Tring, Hertfordshire

P. J. Grant has commented as follows: 'Freshly moulted, fully hooded Black-headed Gulls are rare, but not unknown, in mid January and fairly frequent from mid February onwards,

the spring moult normally starting as early as January. The pale-brown colour of this bird's hood indeed suggests that it was not freshly moulted. It would be interesting to know whether the occasional examples of hooded winter Black-headed Gulls are the result of fully retained summer plumage (in which case, because the complete autumn moult would thus have been missed, the rest of the plumage should also look highly abraded by midwinter), or the growth of new hooded head feathers as part of the complete autumn moult, instead of the usual winter-patterned ones.' EDS

**Abnormal claw lengths of Meadow Pipit** On 22nd March 1985, on Walney Island, Cumbria, I found a passerine corpse composed of right wing, tail, sternum, legs and feet. The measurements (in mm) of tarsi and claws were as follows:

	Left leg	Right leg
Tarsus	27.0	27.0
1st claw	4.0	6.5
• 2nd claw	5.0	7.5
3rd claw	5.0	4.5
Hind claw	11.5	16.0

Svensson (1984, *Identification Guide to European Passerines*) stated that the hind-claw length for Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* is 10-13 mm, and that of Richard's Pipit *A. novaeseelandiae* is 14.5-21.5 mm. The wing formula of the corpse matched that of Meadow Pipit.

TIM DEAN  
Coastguard Cottages, Walney Bird Observatory, Barrow-in-Furness,  
Cumbria LA14 3YQ

This is a cautionary tale, to be noted by anyone tempted to place too much reliance on a single measurement in any identification. EDS

**Grasshopper Warbler behaviour when singing** Regarding the note by A. Banwell (*Brit. Birds* 78: 197), I found it rather surprising that the singing of a Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* from an exposed perch should be claimed, by inference, as unusual. Over 15 years of birdwatching in South Humberside, I have consistently obtained the best and most prolonged views of Grasshopper Warblers in April, when newly arrived migrants regularly sing from exposed perches. An interesting recent piece of behaviour concerned one in Goxhill marsh on 26th April 1984, which, as well as singing from perches in bushes of hawthorn *Crataegus*, was singing while moving about in the bushes with its wings raised and fanned over its back. On one occasion, it flew about 15m, between two bushes, singing constantly in flight and continuing to do so on landing. GRAHAM P. CATLEY  
13 West Acridge, Barton-on-Humber, South Humberside

**Carrion Crow recovering bread from beneath snow** D. Summers-Smith (*Brit. Birds* 77: 25-26) reported food-hiding in snow by a Magpie *Pica pica*. The ability to relocate caches of food made before snowfall is also of interest. Both nutcracker species, European *Nucifraga caryocatactes* and Clark's *N. columbiana*, regularly recover caches from beneath snow, apparently without needing to search once they have landed and begun to dig, although exactly how they do this is not known (see D. Goodwin, 1976, *Crows of the World*; and F. J. Turcek and L. Kelso, 1968, *Comm. Behav. Biol.*



Series A 1: 277-297). On 26th February 1981, at Keele, Staffordshire, I watched a Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* fly to a large lawn, dig down beneath 5-8cm of previously undisturbed snow, remove a tuft of dead grass, pick up a piece of bread, and fly off. The whole process took less than a minute. The cache site was about 4m from the side of a building and 2m from the road kerb, but the expanse of snow itself was seemingly featureless. I had seen several caches of bread and chocolate made elsewhere within this territory before snow fell, and on 11th March, after the snow had gone, a Carrion Crow recovered another cache of bread from the same lawn, approximately 50m from that made beneath the snow. I know of no other record of food-cache recovery from beneath snow by members of the genus *Corvus*.

R. K. WAITE

90 Prince Edward's Road, Lewes, Sussex BN7 1BH

## Letter

**Comments on group characteristics** The rare group study in the September issue (*Brit. Birds* 79: 451, plate 249) gives a photographic record of a species which is still largely unfamiliar to many of us. In March 1986, the individuals of the group were clearly still in winter plumage, with the notable exception of one specimen in advanced spring moult. This is particularly surprising, when it is generally understood that this should not occur before the end of May. The winter plumage is highly variable, a characteristic of a species not remarkable for plumage care. One individual shows evidence of extreme wear (left tarsus). Future progress in ageing techniques may develop from consideration of the advanced state of crown moult, apparent in mature males present. There is some degree of size variation, and fortunately we can for once exclude the possibility of size distortion, associated with perspective illusion (or is it size illusion associated with perspective distortion?). One specimen in the photograph appears to have survived the privations of winter with no appreciable loss of body weight.

Sadly, the photograph reveals little of group behaviour, though it is remarkable for so many individuals of this highly mobile species to be so far from the coast at this stage in the migratory cycle. An all-male assembly is not remarkable, and is even normal. In this instance, a nearby female (out of picture) is clearly the object of the attentions of all nine males. The photograph may show a pre-roost assembly though the males usually separate to their own territories for feeding, roosting and sexual activities. Here we see no evidence of that pugnacious rivalry, which regrettably so characterises the species. Disputes, often taking a form which can be likened to 'sniping' (after an innocent species), appear to be most frequent between individuals in different flocks. Conducted at long range, and often at wide intervals of time, they seldom lead to physical injury, and may constitute displays of distraction to other individuals of the same species.

IAN JOHNSON

3 Woodlea Grove, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2DW

# Diary dates

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This list covers January to December 1987

**9th-11th January** BTO RINGING AND MIGRATION CONFERENCE. Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire. Details from The Ringing Office, BTO, Beech Grove, Tring, Hertfordshire HP23 5NR.

**20th January** BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB. Dr C. J. Feare on 'Man and the Starling family'. Non-members should write (enclosing SAE) at least 21 days before to Hon. Secretary, R. E. F. Peal, 2 Chestnut Lane, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 3AR.

**24th-25th January** YOUNG ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB GARDEN BIRD SURVEY. Details from YOC, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

**31st January** Closing date for entries for 'Bird Photograph of the Year'.

**31st January** Closing date for 'Best recent black-and-white bird-photographs'.

**27th February-1st March** RSPB/IRISH WILDBIRD CONSERVANCY ALL-IRELAND CONFERENCE. Slieve Donard Hotel, Newcastle, Co. Down. Details from RSPB Northern Ireland Office, Belvoir Park Forest, Belfast BT8 4QT.

**28th February** RSPB FILM PREMIÈRE. Royal Festival Hall, London.

**10th March** BOC. Dr Carlo Violani (Milan and Pavia University) on 'Current studies on the birds of Sardinia'. Central London. Write to Hon. Secretary.

**14th March** Closing date for entries for 'Bird Illustrator of the Year'.

**17th March-12th May** YOC MIGRATION PHONE-IN. Telephone Sandy (0767) 80551. Tuesdays only, 5.30 p.m.-7.00 p.m. Records from adults welcomed.

**21st March** SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB/BTO BIRDWATCHERS' CONFERENCE. Glasgow. Details from Jacquie Clark, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT, or from BTO.

**22nd-27th March** THIRD WORLD CONFERENCE ON BIRDS OF PREY. Eilat, Israel. Details from R. D. Chancellor, Hon. Secretary, World Working Group on Birds of Prey, 15 Bolton Gardens, London SW5 0AL.

**27th-29th March** BOU ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND AGM. University of Nottingham. 'The Genetics and Evolution of Bird Populations'. Speakers include Dr Arie van Noordwijk, Dr Fred Cooke, Dr Clive Catchpole and Dr Peter Berthold. Details from Dr D. T. Parkin, Department of Genetics, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD.

**28th March** BTO/BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BIRD CLUB ONE-DAY CONFERENCE. Details from Jim Knight, 319 Bath Road, Cippenham, Slough, Berkshire SL1 5PR.

**10th-12th April** 'BRITISH BIRDS'/BTO JOINT CONFERENCE. Swanwick. Details from Mrs Sheila Cobban, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ, or from Tim Davis, BTO.

**10th-12th April** RSPB MEMBERS' WEEKEND. University of Warwick. Details from Conference Office, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

**2nd-4th May** RSPB NATIONAL SPONSORED BIRDWATCH.

**3rd May** INTERNATIONAL DAWN CHORUS DAY. Information from The Urban Wildlife Group, 11 Albert Street, Birmingham B4 7UA (telephone 021-236 3626).

**18th-24th May** BIRDWATCH UK AND EUROPEAN BIRDWATCH Contact UK National Co-ordinator, Jon Haw, c/o RSPB.

**4th July** ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST AGM. Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, South Kensington, London. Programme details from the Secretary, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.



**24th-28th August** 10TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BIRD CENSUS WORK AND ATLAS STUDIES. Helsinki, Finland. Details from IBCC/The Finnish Ornithological Society, P. Rautatiekatu 13, SF-00100 Helsinki, Finland.

**3rd-4th October** YOC/NAT WEST NATIONAL SPONSORED BIRDWATCH Details from YOC, c/o RSPB.

**24th October** RSPB LONDON DAY AND AGM. Kensington and Chelsea Town Hall, London. Details from Mrs Marcella Hume, RSPB.

**6th-8th November (provisional)** SOC ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND AGM. Marine Hotel, North Berwick. Details from SOC.

**4th-6th December** BTO ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND AGM. Hayes Conference Centre. Details from Tim Davis, BTO.

**11th-13th December (provisional)** NATIONAL EXHIBITION OF CAGE AND AVIARY BIRDS. National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham. Details from Brian Byles, Editor, 'Cage and Aviary Birds', Prospect House, 9-15 Ewell Road, Cheam, Surrey SM3 8BZ.

*Sheila D. Cobban, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ*

## Announcements

**Reduced price ABA membership for 'BB' subscribers** The usual cost of membership of the American Birding Association for 1987 is \$24.00 per annum. By a reciprocal arrangement between 'BB' and the ABA, however, 'BB' subscribers can now join the ABA and receive the bi-monthly journal *Birding* for \$18.00 per annum (family membership \$24.00 per annum).

We feel sure that many 'BB' readers—especially those interested in identification problems associated with Nearctic species—will welcome this opportunity to join the ABA at a special reduced rate. Any 'BB' subscriber joining the ABA now will receive a FREE copy of the 32-page checklist *Traveller's List and Check List for Birds of North America* (1982). Please fill in the membership application form attached to the ABA Fieldcard inserted with this issue, and post it, with your membership fee, to the ABA, Box 4335, Austin, Texas 78765, USA.

**Thank you to our sponsors** The Editorial Board would like to give special thanks to the firms and organisations which have helped *BB* with sponsorship during 1986:

Christopher Helm Publishers Ltd .....	colour plates for 'Identification, habits and status of Great Knot'
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RSPB .....	donation towards publication costs of report of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel
Sunbird .....	'Monthly marathon' competition
ZEISS West Germany .....	sponsors of the Rarities Committee and colour plates for several identification papers and notes

**'The field identification of West Palearctic wheatears'** This major paper, by Peter Clement, illustrated by Alan Harris, was scheduled to appear in this December issue, but circumstances beyond our control have, at the last minute, necessitated that it be held over until next year.

**Binding your 'BB'** We remind subscribers that standard bookbinding of *BB* issues costs £12.65 per volume. Use the form on the back of the index, and send yours in to arrive *before* one of the four annual deadlines: 15th January, 15th March, 1st July and 1st October. The binders' address has recently changed and is now: Chapman Brooks Bookbinders Ltd, Alexander Works, Fordmill Road, London SE6 3JH.

Loose binders are also available, as usual, through British BirdShop, at £5.95 (see page xv).

**County Recorders meeting** The 'BB'-BTO Joint Conference will be the venue for a closed meeting of County Bird Recorders at which they will have the opportunity to exchange ideas and to question the chairmen and members of the Rarities Committee, the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, and the BOU Records Committee. We hope that most County Bird Recorders will be participants at the Conference, but any who are not will nevertheless be very welcome to attend this special meeting, which will be held from 2 p.m. to about 4.30 p.m. on Saturday 11th April at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire. If you are a County Bird Recorder and are not coming to the whole Conference, please write in advance to notify your intention to attend this County Bird Recorders meeting: BB-BTO Conference (Recorders meeting), Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedfordshire MK44 3NJ.

**Bird art display at Joint BB-BTO Conference** Artists who would like their work displayed in this exhibition should contact the organiser, Frederick J. Watson, Botcher Cottage, Church Lane, Shepley, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD8 8AF.

**Bird Photograph of the Year** This annual competition will be jointly sponsored in 1987 by Christopher Helm Publishing Ltd and William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. The full rules (similar to those last year, *British Birds* 79: 45-46) will be published next month. The closing date is Saturday 31st January 1987.

**Best recent black-and-white bird-photographs** The closing date for submission of prints for the twenty-eighth annual selection is Saturday 31st January 1987. The full rules (similar to those last year, *British Birds* 79: 46) will be published next month.

**'BB' button-badges** The pin-on button-badges featuring the *British Birds* Red Grouse logo are still available free for *BB* subscribers. Just send a stamped and self-addressed envelope to: Button-badges, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.



**'BB' car-stickers** The stickers for the inside of car windows are still available free to 'BB' subscribers. Please send a note *and an SAE* to Car stickers, British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

**New books in British BirdShop** In addition to the continuing special offer concerning *The Frontiers of Bird Identification* and a much-reduced price for Michael Warren's *Shorelines*, we are now also offering the following new books:

Birkhead & Perrins *The Mute Swan* (Christopher Helm)

Dalton & Bailey *The Secret Life of an Oakwood* (Century)

Shackleton *Wildlife and Wilderness: an artist's world* (Clive Holloway)

Please use the form on page xv now.

## Requests

**Records of breeding Black-throated Divers** The Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica* is a rare and threatened breeding species in Britain, currently confined to Scotland. A paper on its breeding status is due to be published in *British Birds* shortly. As part of these continuing studies, the RSPB is attempting to document any changes that have occurred in the numbers of breeding pairs over the last 50 or more years. We would be pleased to hear from anyone who has records of Black-throated Divers on lochs during the breeding season at any time in the past. We need to know the loch name (with grid reference); the year and date; numbers of adults seen; and any evidence of breeding. Negative records are also useful, particularly if these relate to lochs where you have known the species to be present previously or subsequently. Coastal sightings of Black-throated Divers in winter would also be welcomed. If you have previously sent in information, please just update this for recent years. All information will be treated in confidence and should be sent to Dr Greg Mudge and Roy Dennis, RSPB Highland Office, Munloch, Ross-shire IV8 8ND.

**Marsh tern photographs** For research purposes, and for possible publication in *British Birds* with a forthcoming paper by Per Alström, we especially need photographs (black-and-white prints or colour transparencies) of (1) juvenile and winter-plumaged Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*, (2) winter-plumaged Black Tern *C. niger*, (3) winter-plumaged White-winged Black Tern *C. leucopterus*, and (4) perched juvenile White-winged Black Tern. Please send prints and slides to Mrs Sheila Cobban, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

## Reviews

**The Secret Life of an Oakwood: a photographic essay.** By Stephen Dalton with Jill Bailey. Century, London, 1986. 160 pages; 145 colour plates. £14.95.

Stunning! That is really the only word to describe this 'photographic essay' on a small oakwood near Ardingly in Sussex.

There has obviously been a lot of thought and planning—for instance, the four full-page

photographs of the same woodland stream in spring, summer, autumn and winter—but on top of this it is clear that Stephen Dalton is not only one of the world's top nature-photographers, but also has an artist's eye. He gives us pictures of amazing beauty, from the tiny capsule of a moss to mammals, such as badger, and spectacular treescapes, with intriguing shapes and subtle colour patterns.

It is inevitable that every photograph loses at least a little in reproduction, but the printers (Mandarin Offset International Ltd in Hong Kong), the designers (John Calmann and King Ltd of London) and the publishers (Century Hutchinson Ltd) all deserve a mention, for Stephen Dalton's pictures are crystal clear and seem to be reproduced with absolutely true colour. However skilled an author might be, it would be very hard to provide a text to match the standard of the photographs. Jill Bailey will, I hope, not be too upset if I suggest that it is for Stephen Dalton's evocative and wonderful photographs that this book will be purchased. I shall treasure my copy, and buy one or two more for special friends. J. T. R. SHARROCK

**Evenings at the Coot and Corncrake: a bird-watcher's quiz book. Compiled by Chris Harbard. Cartoons by Paul Cemmick; additional illustrations by Robert Gillmor and Crispin Fisher.** Collins, London, 1986. 128 pages; 28 line-drawings. Paperback £2.95.

The location of the 'Coot and Corncrake' pub has deliberately been made obscure. In all but name, however, it bears an uncanny resemblance to many a hostelry frequented by bird-watchers. Its clientele seems familiar too, particularly the central characters: Twitchett, Stringwell, Stickler and Listman.

Evenly spaced through the book are ten tales from the 'Coot and Corncrake'. All are amusing and most contain a decidedly tall story from Twitchett, a man prone to reminiscences which, like bottles of good wine, have obviously matured with age. Most of the tales include ornithological inaccuracies (and some deliberate lies) and each is followed by three or four questions designed to test the reader's perception and bird knowledge.

The other major feature is the quizzes. There are 11 of them, again distributed throughout the book to add variety. Each quiz has its own bird theme and is composed of 64 short questions. All have been compiled not only for the reader's enjoyment and enlightenment, but also for subsequent use in team competitions. The questions vary from the simple to the very difficult (or even the downright misleading, if the reader doesn't ignore the notification that 'all questions refer to British birds' in the Miscellany quiz, where some questions mention Caracara, Jabiru and Ivory-billed Woodpecker, and some answers are equally foreign).

There are five double-page spreads depicting pages from Twitchett's field notebook, complete with sketches. Needless to say, there are inaccuracies and misidentifications. Each pair of leaves is followed by two or three questions concerning the validity of certain alleged sightings.

The seven questions that follow the final chapter are clearly intended to be answered only by either the very brave or the very foolish. The participating reader, by selecting one answer out of four to each question, is practising self-analysis. His total score determines his position in the birding hierarchy by giving him the status of Maniac, Twitcher, Birder, Birdwatcher or Dude (this, we are told, is the descending order of merit).

Cartoons, some of which illustrate the stories and some of which are funny in themselves, are liberally scattered throughout. There is no agonising suspense for the reader, as the answers to all the questions posed are included at the back of the book.

*Evenings at the Coot and Corncrake* is light-hearted, educational and entertaining, and all at a low price. It is amusingly written and illustrated, and contains a wealth of bird information in its 700 questions and answers.

PETER LANSDOWN

**Watching Birds in Ireland: guide to the best places to watch birds in Ireland. By Clive Hutchinson.** Country House, Dublin, 1986. 144 pages; 16 black-and-white plates; 4 line-drawings; 63 maps. Paperback IR£4.95.

This square-shaped 144-page paperback is a 'must' for anyone who lives in or contemplates visiting Ireland. After 30 pages of sound, general advice on birdwatching, why Ireland is special for birds, what equipment is needed, organisations, surveys, and so on, the final



five-sevenths gets down to the nitty gritty of the best birdwatching localities, taking each of Ireland's 32 counties in turn. Perhaps the most useful feature is that every county has the Ordnance Survey map for the area reproduced (showing all the roads) with the localities clearly numbered. There are tiny maps of the whole of Ireland as well, so that one constantly knows *exactly* where one is, and the cross referencing between text and maps is very good (except for those counties with a large number of localities, spreading over several pages, when one has to turn back to the small key map to find the locations). The short texts (inevitable with over 300 localities included) are sufficient to give a good idea of the range of habitats and species of bird likely to be seen at each site.

Although similar in concept to John Gooders' *The New Where to Watch Birds*, the layout and design are completely different. For easy reference, in a handy format, it would be difficult to better this neat volume. Thoroughly recommended.

J. T. R. SHARROCK

**Wildlife and Wilderness: an artist's world.** By Keith Shackleton. Clive Holloway Books, London, 1986. 120 pages; 49 colour plates; five line-drawings. £15.00.

At any wildlife art exhibition, the galleries are frequently dominated by the 'Keith Shackletons'. Seascapes and views of ice and mountain, for which only adjectives such as huge, breathtaking and powerful begin to convey the way in which this master craftsman distils the essence of a scene and places it on canvas. I should, however, perhaps not say 'canvas', for Keith Shackleton admits in his highly readable text—displaying that he is as skilled with words as he is with brush strokes—that he paints 'on hardboard, a substance that enjoys a very low regard in purist circles but nonetheless can offer a surface of unbeatable sympathy to brushwork at about one-eighth of the price and has other advantages . . . if . . . the composition is deemed to be lopsided or top heavy, an inch or two may be sawn off one side, the top or the bottom, to restore the visual harmony.' Keith Shackleton's unpretentious, lively writing reads as if he is talking to us, his audience. He explains how many of the paintings included in this book came to be, and there is almost always an entertaining as well as an interesting anecdote to accompany them.

So often—regrettably—one finds a book of marvellous paintings with a 'padding' text; or a fine text accompanied by mediocre or slightly irrelevant paintings. Here, however, text and paintings complement each other. This is one of those books which can give real enjoyment to those who are willing to look and read. Since most of his paintings are gigantic, and this book is a mere 295 mm × 242 mm, it must be noted that the reproduction is so excellent that each page is still filled with impact. Most of the 49 paintings include at least one bird, although there are also some cetaceans and the odd fish.

Whether or not you are a 'sea and ice' lover, you should turn the pages of this book: you might be converted. It merits a place of honour on *my* bookshelves.

J. T. R. SHARROCK

## News and comment

*Mike Everett and Robin Prytherch*

**Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'**

**Ornithologist honoured** Congratulations to Professor Geoffrey Matthews, the Wildfowl Trust's Director of Research and Conservation, who was recently created an OBE.

**Cairn Gorm worry** There was dismay when, earlier this year, the Minister for Local Government and the Environment at the Scottish Office did not 'call in' the planning application for snow fencing in the Northern

Corries SSSI on Cairn Gorm. The local planners had indicated their consent and, while the Minister told Highland Regional Council that his decision did not give the green light for further skiing developments, one is entitled to be pessimistic . . . Once again, it sounds like the familiar thin end of the wedge. Considering the unique wildlife value of the whole area around the mountain, it is scandalous that, despite all the designations it has on paper and the well-known attraction of its slopes to more and more skiers, there is still no overall strategy for the area. Piecemeal planning and constant backs-to-the-wall battles by conservationists are not the answer. We applaud the strong stand taken by the Nature Conservancy Council when it wrote to the Minister. Government has a habit of ignoring its advice, but perhaps this time they may listen. We shall see.

**What's about in Uist** Tim Dix (Old Post Office, Stilligarry, South Uist) writes to tell us that he has installed a book in his porch in which visitors to the Uists and Benbecula are welcome to record their observations, not just for the benefit of other visitors, but also to help the small but active scatter of local birders. As Tim points out, the local grapevine is a bit thin and his book could help enormously. The system could work like that at Cley; Tim says 'I may not be as good looking as Nancy, but any visitors may find themselves sitting down to *free* tea or coffee' if he's at home. All records are welcome, not just of rarities—migrants, wader counts, sea-watches, raptors, etc., ' . . . in fact *anything* of interest—a Blue Tit is almost a mega-tick here!'

**Seaforth Bird Report** This new report covers 1985, but also summarises bird records back to 1973 for the Seaforth Reserve (near Bootle) of the Lancashire Trust for Nature Conservation. At £1.75, it is available from Seaforth Nature Reserve, Pumping Station Compound, NW Royal Seaforth Dock, Liverpool L21 1JD.

**Bird reports and journals** It has long been our practice to publicise a selection of bird reports and journals, but we are all too well aware that we miss a great many. Space—or rather the lack of it—often means that some that we are sent don't get a mention at all. The number we receive is growing all the

time, so we feel that we must make a change. From now on, we shall publicise only *new* publications, or those which we feel require a special mention. We would strongly recommend that the well-established reports are advertised formally elsewhere in 'BB'. If you feel that your report or local journal includes an especially newsworthy item, tell us—that will increase the chances of it receiving a mention in this column.

**Fair Isle honoured** Nobody needs to be told why Fair Isle is so outstanding, but perhaps many (in the south at least, which the late James Robertson Justice once told ME 'begins at Inverness') are not aware that it is a National Scenic Area and an SSSI and enjoys the same status as a National Nature Reserve. On 19th June 1986, it was awarded the Council of Europe's prestigious 'European Diploma'—only the 25th ever, the 5th in Britain and the 2nd in Scotland—in recognition of its outstanding natural history interest and cultural heritage. The late George Waterston would have been delighted. The National Trust for Scotland, who look after the island, deserve a pat on the back, and we should recognise, too, the important part the Bird Observatory has played; not least, we should also congratulate the islanders themselves.

**WWF money** We often forget that the World Wildlife Fund gives generous financial support to conservation and education efforts in the UK. It comes as no surprise to learn that £2 million went to international projects in 1985, but how many of us realise that £1.1 million went to UK projects? Of this, the RSPB received over £100,000 for important reserve purchases, and the county trusts and the RSNCC got £231,000 for land purchase and other schemes. In all, grant aid helped in the purchase of 72 sites (24 of them of national or international importance) and involved some £376,000.

**Wildlife Link Awards** In September, awards were given to two men by Wildlife Link, which is the liaison body for the major voluntary organisations in the UK involved in wildlife protection. One went to Councillor Archibald Fletcher of Islay who, in extremely difficult local circumstances and in the face of much opposition on the island, stood firm for the preservation of Duich Moss, the botanical SSSI which also holds an



important roost of Greenland Whitefronts *Anser albifrons flavirostris*. Ultimately, the site was saved. The other went to Lord Chelwood (formerly Sir Tufton Beamish) for his tremendous work during the long and arduous passage through parliament of the Wildlife and Countryside Bill in 1980-81. Most birders have little idea of the amount of hard and dedicated work done on behalf of birds by such people—Lord Chelwood rather ‘behind the scenes’ and Mr Fletcher as what the *Oban Times* aptly called ‘the true and sensible voice of Islay’. We congratulate them—and are grateful to them both.

**Good-value ‘habitat’** The newsletter of the Council for Environmental Conservation (CoEnCo), *habitat*, is always full of interesting and topical items. The 1987 subscription prices are: ordinary subscription £7.50, associates £10.00, overseas sea mail £9.50 and overseas air mail £10.50. Why not give it a trial for a year? The address to write to is: CoEnCo, 80 York Way, London N19AG.

**OSME expedition in the news** It was good to see 1¼ pages—with photographs and long quotes from Richard Porter—devoted to the Ornithological Society of the Middle East’s North Yemen Expedition in the June issue of the magazine *The Middle East*.

**Honour for Keith Shackleton** An annual exhibition in the USA which really deserves more attention ‘this side of the Water’ is the ‘Birds in Art’ exhibition put on by the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum, in Wausau, Wisconsin. The eleventh exhibition was this year, and for only the second time a British artist (Keith Shackleton) was elected Master Wildlife Artist of the Year; the first was Sir Peter Scott six years ago. Over 70 artists, many with their wives, were the guests of the Museum over an action-packed weekend in September 1986. A majority of the artists are American, but the international element is growing and eight countries were represented this year, a trend that is likely to continue. The very varied and very high-quality exhibition remained at Wausau during September and October, about half of the paintings then going on tour, to The Frye Art Museum in Seattle, Washington, during 22nd November to 28th December, The Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History in Santa Barbara, California, during 15th January to 22nd February 1987, The Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Honolulu,



**344.** Keith Shackleton: Master Wildlife Artist of the Year (see above) (*R. J. Chandler*)

Hawaii, during 12th March to 18th April, and the Beijing Natural History Museum in The People’s Republic of China during 4th-31st May. (*Contributed by Martin W. Woodcock*)

**David M. Cottridge goes freelance** In response to our request, David has supplied the following news: ‘Since winning the “Bird Photograph of the Year” award in 1983, life has been hectic, with not enough hours in the day to fit everything in comfortably. Requests for material have come from many sources worldwide, including Sweden, Israel, South Africa, Australia and North America. Pressure of work has forced me into a decision to move from full-time teaching of photography to part-time, with a view in the near future to becoming a full-time bird photographer. The aspects of teaching, however, are not being given up altogether, as I now have a full programme of bird slide talks for 1986/87.

‘The Christmas period of 1984/85 was spent on an expedition to Nepal to photograph Himalayan birds. This proved to be very successful, and is to be the first of several more such ventures to the region. Part of the spring of 1986 was spent in Israel, photo-

graphing the spring migration through Elat, with a return trip planned in February 1987. This is hopefully to be followed in April of next year with a visit to the island of St Vincent in the Caribbean to photograph the birdlife for the St Vincent government, with particular emphasis on the endemic parrot, the St Vincent Amazon *Amazona guildingii*, one of the endangered species of the world. In August 1986, I took part in one of the pelagic trips off Scilly which turned up Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* and, perhaps even more remarkable, humming-bird hawk-moth *Macroglossum stellatarum* 100 km southwest of the Bishop Rock.'

Anyone wishing to use David Cottridge's photographic services can reach him by writing to 6 Sutherland Road, Tottenham, London N17 0BN, or telephoning London (01) 808 1341.

**'Ichkeul: Between the Desert and the Deep Blue Sea'** A lake in the desert, well known to the Romans and, in more recent times, recognised as one of the Mediterranean's three most important wetlands—a birdwatcher's paradise. It is the only marsh in the world to be protected by three international conventions, but is still under threat of drainage.

Lake Ichkeul—pronounced 'ish-cool'—is a wonderfully rich and beautiful lake and marsh, 130 km<sup>2</sup> in extent. In winter, when rain falls in North Africa and the rivers flood, the lake becomes fresh and home for up to 200,000 wildfowl, including all of central Europe's Greylag Geese. In spring, it is an important breeding ground for many birds. In the hot, dry summer, when the inflow of sea-water makes the lake salty, Greater Flamingos and other wading birds move in.

The marsh is also home to wild boar, jackal, mongoose and otter, and the fields surrounding the lake, once the granary of the Roman Empire, bloom with a profusion of flowers. Above all, the lake is permanent fresh-water and an oasis for migrants that have survived a crossing of the Sahara desert.

Ichkeul is also a story of the classic conflict between development and nature conservation. This wet land in a dry country may not survive, for Tunisia is a developing country and needs fresh water for agriculture and its growing population. Two of the intended six dams on rivers flowing into the lake have already been built, but the Tunisian Government in conjunction with University College London and French experts, have devised a scheme which may allow both

people and wildlife to flourish. The solution may be only temporary and further research required, but at least the challenge of retaining Ichkeul's dynamic water variations and related wildlife is being met. The jewel between the desert and the deep blue sea may yet survive. (*Contributed by Hugh Miles*)

A film on this area—photographed and produced by Hugh Miles, written and narrated by Barry Paine, and edited by Tom Poore—is due to be transmitted on BBC2 at 8 p.m. on 7th December. There is a special competition associated with the film: TV viewers are invited to attempt to identify all the birds seen or heard during the programme. The judges will be Chris Mead, Mike Smart and Jeffery Boswall, and the winner's prize will be a wildlife holiday for two. Clearly worth watching on 7th December!

**Change of Recorder** Paul Trodd, White Garth, West Parade, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU6 1EN, has taken over from Barry Nightingale as Recorder for Bedfordshire.

**Change of Recorder** I. P. Hodgson and T. N. Hodge, 73 Middle Deal Road, Deal, Kent CT14 9RG, have taken over from A. C. B. Henderson as Joint Recorders for Kent.

**PO promotion** Has any other business got such a friendly and helpful local Postmaster? We doubt it. At Blunham Post Office, Don Draper has even composed an advertising poem for us:

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# Recent reports

*Keith Allsopp and Ian Dawson*

**These are largely unchecked reports,  
not authenticated records**

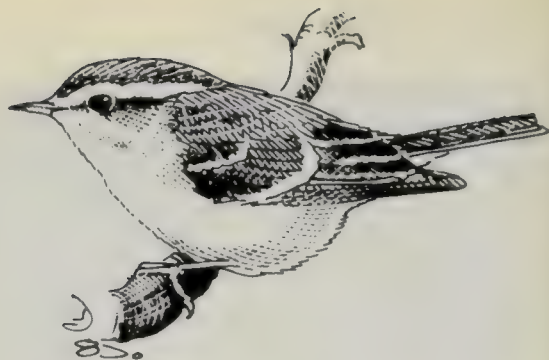
The dates in this report refer to September unless otherwise stated.

## Weather and passerine movements

With anticyclones never very far away, the weather remained calm and settled for most of the month. The centre of pressure stayed mainly to the south and west, resulting in westerly to northerly winds, the latter being of great help to the migrants, but not much fun for the birdwatcher. For two periods, migrants were disturbed by weather fronts lying east-west across southern Britain, with easterly winds on their northern sides. The first, from 12th to 14th, resulted in falls of **Redstarts** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* on the East Coast, including 26 at Spurn (Humberside) on 13th and 35 at Landguard (Suffolk) on 14th. Rarer species noted were a **Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* at Sandwich Bay (Kent) on 14th, a **Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus* on the Wirral (Merseyside) on



14th, **Red-breasted Flycatchers** *Ficedula parva* at Blakeney (Norfolk) on 14th and at Filey Brigg (North Yorkshire) on 13th, and a **Melodious Warbler** *Hippolais polyglotta* at Nanquidno (Cornwall). The second, from 24th to 26th, brought more **Red-breasted Flycatchers**, seven being reported subsequently from East Coast watch points and one at Hook Head (Co. Wexford) on 27th. Giving a real taste of autumn was the arrival of **Yellow-browed Warblers** *Phylloscopus inornatus*, most on the East Coast, groups of four being seen at Flamborough (Humberside), Wells (Norfolk), Holland Haven



(Essex) and Filey Brigg; in the west, three were on Cape Clear Island (Co. Cork) on 26th. One on Fair Isle, Shetland, on 26th, however, was accompanied by a **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella certhiola* and a **Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola*, and the first one at Landguard arrived with Suffolk's first **Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* on 25th. Other Siberian waifs included a **Richard's Pipit** *Anthus novaeseelandiae* at Staines Reservoir (Surrey) on 26th, and a **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* at Blakeney on 27th to 29th; earlier another Citrine had been reported from Fair Isle. Settled anticyclonic weather allows vagrants to wander farther afield. The first Irish **Marsh Warbler** *Acrocephalus palustris* was found on board a trawler off Co. Cork, but subsequently died on 11th; Walney (Cumbria) also recorded its first on 29th, and a **Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti* was a new species for Skokholm (Dyfed) on 9th. A **Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* at Walney on 17th followed earlier August sightings at Lodmoor (Dorset) on 16th and Fairburn Ings (North Yorkshire) on 30th; **Woodchat Shrikes** *Lanius senator* were found in the Isles of Scilly on 31st August and on Ailsa Craig (Strathclyde) on 25th-26th (plate 347); a **Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides* stayed at Lowestoft (Suffolk) between 20th and 22nd; and **Arctic Warblers** *P. borealis* visited Fair Isle in mid month and the Isles of Scilly on 30th. **Aquatic Warblers** *Acrocephalus paludicola* were still to be found at Marazion (Cornwall) in early September, and **Barred Warblers** *Sylvia nisoria* could be found sparingly along the East Coast and also turned up on Cape Clear Island on 26th, Crookhaven (Co. Cork) on 27th and 28th and on Walney on 6th; a similar pattern occurred for **Icterine Warblers** *Hippolais icterina*, with one reaching Co. Cork. Two to three **Yellow-breasted Buntings** *Emberiza aureola* were found in mid month on Fair Isle, with a **Little Bunting** *E. pusilla* there on 8th, a **Two-barred Crossbill** *Loxia leucoptera* on 1st (plate 348), and also early arrivals of **Lapland Buntings** *Calcarius lapponicus* were

noted there, with subsequent sightings south to Cornwall by 21st. **Ortolan Buntings** *Emberiza hortulana* were found scattered across the south of England, including a small flock at Nanquidno in mid month. **Scarlet Rosefinches** *Carpodacus erythrinus*, however, were found to the north, on Fetlar on 29th August, Kirkstanton Moss (Cumbria) on 2nd, Fair Isle on 8th, Walton-on-the-Naze (Essex) on 13th and Cape Clear Island on 26th; and a **Rose-coloured Starling** *Sturnus roseus* was photographed at the Skerries (Co. Dublin) during 4th-13th (plates 345 & 346).

**Bramblings** *Fringilla montifringilla* were early arrivals on the East Coast from 13th, and **Siskins** *Carduelis spinus* were noticeable after 20th. Of the departing migrants, the more obvious hirundines were seen moving southward along the East Coast during the first week, together with a few **Swifts** *Apus apus*; later, on 21st to 23rd, an estimated 100,000 **House Martins** *Delichon urbica* passed through Sandwich Bay. Near-passerine migrants included further records of **Wrynecks** *Jynx torquilla* (plate 349) after the invasion in late August, some reaching Co. Cork, but most being scattered across southern England. Rare finds were migrant **Nightjars** *Caprimulgus europaeus* at Orsett (Essex), with three to four on 27th, and one at Teesmouth (Cleveland) on 10th, a **Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* near Bradwell (Essex) on 20th and 21st, and a **Hoopoe** *Upupa epops* at Sandwich Bay on 10th.

### Seabirds

The only high winds of the month, except in northern waters, were in the North Sea on 3rd, when a small depression intensified after crossing Northern Britain. **Sooty Shearwaters** *Puffinus griseus* were blown onshore, with counts of up to 90 being made off Norfolk, Humberside and Northumberland. In the west, however, 300 were seen off Malin Head (Co. Donegal) on 21st, the same movement including two **Great Shearwaters** *P. gravis*. Another of this last species was seen at Tynemouth (Tyne & Wear) on 17th. Inexplicably, with no extensive gales, several seabirds were found inland. There were **Manx Shearwaters** *P. puffinus* at Farmoor Reservoir (Oxfordshire) on 1st, Llangamarch Wells (Powys) on 3rd, Croydon (Surrey) and Birmingham (West Midlands). A **Fulmar** *Fulmarus glacialis* was found on the A43, near Weekley (Northamptonshire) on 13th, a **Gannet** *Sula bassana* at Coventry (Warwickshire) and a **Storm**



**Petrel** *Hydrobates pelagicus* at Hanningfield Reservoir (Essex) on 11th. **Leach's Petrels** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* were reported to be scarce off Ireland, and only singles were noted at Cley on 3rd, at East Tilbury (Essex) on 12th and 13th, Whitburn (Tyne & Wear) on 11th, and one released at Sandwich Bay having been picked up on a cross-Channel ferry on 8th. Also found inland was a **Great Skua** *Stercorarius skua* at Farmoor Reservoir on 12th, but at Cley a **South Polar Skua** *S. maccormicki* was claimed on 6th. Up to four **Long-tailed Skuas** *S. longicaudus* were found off the Northeast coast and another off the Cork coast; while even fewer **Pomarine Skuas** *S. pomarinus* were reported. **Sabine's Gulls** *Larus sabini* were also scarce, with three seen off Co. Cork and singles at Carnsore Point (Co. Wexford) on 13th, Whitburn on 3rd and 14th, and Sandwich Bay on 15th and 18th. Concentrations of **Black Terns** *Chlidonias niger* occurred at Sizewell (Suffolk), with ten on 3rd, and at Farmoor Reservoir, 30 on 15th. The latter flock included one **White-winged Black Tern** *C. leucopterus*, while another, also on 15th, was seen at Dungeness (Kent). The 15th was also the day of the **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* at Cley. A late but notable report was of 140 **Little Gulls** *Larus minutus* gathered at Hornsea Mere (Humberside) on 28th August. A **Franklin's Gull** *L. pipixcan* at Pegwell Bay (Kent) on 26th was the sole Nearctic rarity, and **Mediterranean Gulls** *L. melanocephalus* were the only notable finds among gull flocks, with eight reports from the East Coast and one at Hayle (Cornwall) on 22nd.





### Wildfowl

A **Red-necked Grebe** *Podiceps grisegena* was found on Buttermere (Cumbria) in early September, and several were reported along the East Coast. Goose flocks began arriving early, probably taking advantage of the northerly winds. **Pink-footed Geese** *Anser brachyrhynchus* had arrived at Walney by 16th, **Barnacle Geese** *B. leucopsis* were passing through Northumberland at the end of the month, and **Brent Geese** *B. bernicla* began arriving from 6th, but at Strangford Lough (Co. Down) the 5,000 which had collected there by 23rd were all adults. A **King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis* was a complete surprise at Scolt Head (Norfolk) on 6th, where it stayed until 14th. Other finds were a **Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* on Cape Clear Island from 26th to 28th, and **Red-crested Pochards** *Netta rufina* at Walsall (West Midlands) on 17th and on the North Bull (Dublin) on 28th.

### Wading birds

The numbers of passage waders seen inland and the incidence of Nearctic species was lower than in recent years, reflecting the settled weather pattern, **Little Stints** *Calidris minuta* and **Curlew Sandpipers** *C. ferruginea* being noticeably scarce. There were two reports of **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus*, one at Royal Portbury Docks (Avon) on 19th, moving to Severnside (Avon) on 20th, and another at Colne Point (Essex) on 20th. A **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* remained on the Ouse Washes (Cambridgeshire) into September and another appeared at Rutland Water (Leicestershire) during the second week, while there were three together on Tophill Low Reservoir (North Humber-side) (plates 350 & 351). Ireland hosted most of the American species, a **Lesser Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* at The Mullet (Co. Mayo) on 29th, and **Semi-palmated Sandpipers** *Calidris pusilla* at The Gull (Co. Wexford), two from 8th to 13th, at

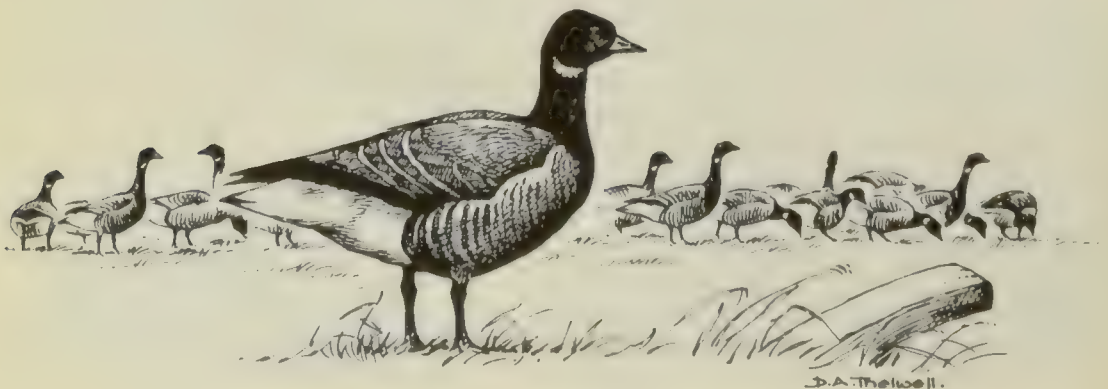
Tacumshin (Co. Wexford), one on 9th, and one at Swords (Dublin) on 30th. In England, a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* stayed at Druridge Pool (Northumberland) from 24th to 28th, and a **Baird's Sandpiper** *Calidris bairdii* was present from 29th at Teesmouth. Reports of larger wading species included a **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* at Lodmoor (Dorset) and another late in the month in Orkney, **Little Egrets** *Egretta garzetta* at Hayle on 20th and Langstone Harbour (Hampshire) on 25th, and a **Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*, unusually at Elvaston Quarry (Derbyshire) from 20th August until 7th. Quite a number of **Spotted Crakes** *Porzana porzana* were found, at Blakeney from 5th to 14th, Skokholm on 10th, Cresswell Pond (Northumberland) on 14th, at Marazion, and two in the Isles of Scilly.

### Birds of prey

Migrant **Buzzards** *Buteo buteo* were reported at Sandwich Bay on 4th and 5th, and at Spurn on 10th, where also passing through were **Marsh Harriers** *Circus aeruginosus* on 8th and 17th and a **Hen Harrier** *C. cyaneus* on 7th. A **Montagu's Harrier** *C. pygargus* was a surprise visitor to Tring (Hertfordshire) on 7th.

### Latest news

In first third of November, two star birds appeared on 4th: **Gray Catbird** *Dumetella carolinensis* seen briefly on Cape Clear Island before flying off south out to sea; and **Chimney Swift** *Chaetura pelagica* in Scilly. Other Nearctic birds at this time included **Bonaparte's Gull** *Larus philadelphia* at Newlyn (Cornwall) and **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* on Anglesey. The most star-studded locality was Titchfield (Hampshire) with **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*, **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularia* and **Sociable Plover** *Chettusia gregaria*.





**345 & 346.** Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*, Co. Dublin, September 1986 (left, Dick Coombes; right, J. Malins)

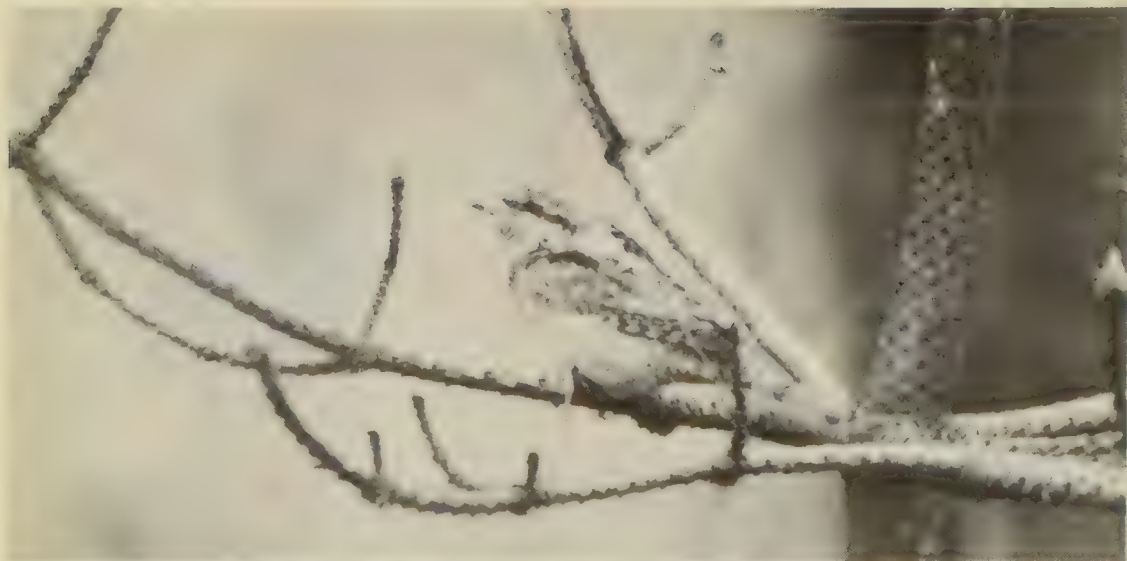
**347.** Juvenile Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*, Strathclyde, September 1986 (B. Zonfrillo)



**348.** Adult male Two-barred Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera*, Shetland, September 1986 (J. B. Higgott)







349. Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Humberside, September 1986 (Steve Young)



350 & 351. Red-necked Phalaropes *Phalaropus lobatus*, North Humberside, September 1986 (John Hewitt)



# Note

**Behaviour of juvenile Baillon's Crake** During July and August 1982, at Phassouri reedbeds, Akrotiri salt lake, Cyprus, Gordon W. Rayner and I spent many hours in a hide watching at least six Baillon's Crakes *Porzana pusilla* (plates 352-354). Most appeared to be juveniles, including two with underdeveloped wings. The crakes spent much of the time feeding normally by picking small unidentifiable food items from the mud or the base of the reeds. Several times, however, they were noted clambering among the reeds at least 1 m above ground level. A juvenile was twice seen to catch small unidentified fish 2-3 cm in length, wash them in the water and then swallow them alive (the Water Rails *Rallus aquaticus* present often caught fish, but, by contrast, stabbed them with their beaks before washing and eating them).



On two occasions, one of the younger juveniles was feeding warily out in the open when its attention was attracted by something (perhaps a predator, or GWR who was seated in the open close by?): the crake stretched upright, then turned and, with head outstretched, scurried for cover, weaving from side to side with its wings extended and flapping ineffectively; twice it stopped suddenly and peered towards the presumed source of alarm before entering the reedbed. When dashing along, it uttered a series of 'chip' calls, seven or eight notes in two seconds, slightly higher in pitch in the middle of the series.

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BWP2 states that captive Baillon's Crakes took small fish, but makes no mention of clambering up reeds. Eds





352-354. Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*, Cyprus, July 1982 (T. Box)





## Seventy-five years ago...

---

'On this large loch there were only two pairs of Black-throated Divers, and we did not discover the other nest. I should have liked to have spent more time amongst these birds, but the nesting season is so short; and as I had decided to spend the whole of the summer in trying to secure the life-history of the Cuckoo in photographs, I had to hurry south. OLIVER G. PIKE, F.R.P.S., F.Z.S.' (*Brit. Birds* 5: 185, December 1911)

## If the caption fits

---

**T**his new, occasional, short feature will show one of the photographs submitted to *British Birds* which we feel demands to have an appropriately humorous or irreverent caption. We shall suggest ours, but hope that readers will react by coming up with an even better caption. We shall include photographs in this feature only if the photographers have agreed to this light-hearted use of their serious work. We welcome submission by photographers of black-and-white prints for possible inclusion in the future.

This first photograph, of four Sandwich Terns *Sterna sandvicensis* (plate 355), was taken by P. Munsterman in the Netherlands in September 1979. If you can think of a funnier caption, please send it to us, addressed to: If the caption fits, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.





355. 'If I preen regularly, will I grow up to be an Elegant Tern?'

## PhotoSpot

### 21. Desert Finch

On moderate views, the Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta* is just another sombrely coloured desert bird (plate 356), so that the first close views of one can come as quite a surprise—or at least they did to me—when they show a striking and beautifully marked bird (plates 357 & 358). The wing-markings (often semi-concealed at rest) are the most obvious feature, and in

356. Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*, Israel, November 1985 (Paul Doherty)





**357.** Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*, Israel, November 1985 (Paul Doherty)

flight there is a conspicuous wing-bar. In the breeding season, the bill is black or grey-black. The flight call, a pleasing trill, is very different from the nasal brayings of Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githaginea*.

The breeding range stretches from western China to the eastern Mediterranean, but it is probably in southeastern Turkey or in Israel that most people first meet this species. The possibility of a stray turning up in Western Europe must be remote (unlike the Trumpeter Finch, its range does not extend to include the western Mediterranean), but if one did it would keep the lucky finder busy with superlatives.





358. Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*, Israel, November 1985 (Paul Doherty)

I am very grateful to Hadoram Shirihai and the Israeli Nature Reserves Authority, whose help enabled me to photograph this species.

PAUL DOHERTY

10 Cheriton Way, Maidstone, Kent ME16 0PH

## Corrections

### VOLUME 78

#### Pages

- 422 PLUMAGE, AGE AND MOULT TERMINOLOGY Plate 200 shows an adult winter (not a first-winter) Dunlin *Calidris alpina*.  
 486 PARROT CROSSBILLS IN BRITAIN Line 22: 'Tyne & Wear' should read 'Durham'.  
 522 RECENT REPORTS Birds of prey. Line 7: '*Falco subbuteo*' should read '*Falco vespertinus*'.

VOLUME 79

Pages

- 28 LITTLE SHEARWATERS IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND Line 6: '1982' should read '1981'.  
 116 WOODLARKS IN BRITAIN, 1968-83 References: 'FORSTER, C. R.' should read 'FORSTER, J.'.  
 336 PRODUCT REPORTS 'Benbo Mk. 1' tripod. Lines 16 and 24: 'Bembo' should read 'Benbo'.  
 504 GREATER SAND PLOVER IN NORFOLK Two Caspian Plovers occurred near Great Yarmouth on 22nd May 1890 (not 1894), one shot and one seen.  
 506 NOTES Arctic Tern with head-pattern resembling that of Forster's Tern. Authors: 'ALLAN BROWN' should read 'ALAN BROWN'.

## Monthly marathon

The third photograph (plate 262 in the September issue) was clearly trickier to identify than was either of the first two (Skylark 68% right and Brambling 87% right). Entrants identified it as:

Bluethroat <i>Luscinia svecica</i>	(45%)
Sedge Warbler <i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	(23%)
Moustached Warbler <i>A. melanopogon</i>	(10%)
Siberian Rubythroat <i>L. calliope</i>	(5%)
Redwing <i>Turdus iliacus</i>	(4%)
Great Reed Warbler <i>A. arundinaceus</i>	(3%)
Paddyfield Warbler <i>A. agricola</i>	(2%)
Radde's Warbler <i>Phylloscopus schwarzi</i>	(1%)

There were also a small number of entries identifying it as Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*, Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*, Citrine Wagtail *M. citreola*, Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*, Siberian Thrush *Zoothera sibirica*, Dusky Thrush *Turdus naumanni*, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola*, Grasshopper Warbler *L. naevia*, Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps*, Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum*, Melodious Warbler *H. polyglotta*, Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*, Black-headed Bush Shrike *Tchagra senegala*, Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*, Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus* and Northern Waterthrush *Seiurus noveboracensis*.

Although the majority of competitors got the answer wrong this time (despite its being a colour picture), the species named most often was once again the correct solution. It was indeed a Bluethroat, photographed in Egypt by Don Roberson in November 1981.

After these first three pictures, only 81 entrants have identified all three correctly, and 16 more are at their heels, with numbers 2 and 3 both right.

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We are still receiving some entries in letters (they must be on *postcards* to be eligible) or with no name and address (again invalid, of course). We have also received some 'double entries' (e.g. answers for numbers 1 and 2 on the same postcard); until now, these have been accepted as legitimate entries, since there has been nothing in the rules to bar them, provided they were received before the earlier deadline, but from now on *each answer must be on a separate postcard*.

Do keep your entries flowing in. We think that some of the photographs coming up are really tricky, so that, even if you misidentified the Bluethroat, you could still end up as the winner. Have a go every month! You could win a £1,000-plus SUNBIRD holiday for the price of a few postage stamps.

**359.** 'Monthly marathon' competition. Photograph number 6. Identify this species. If you succeed with ten in a row, you could win a SUNBIRD holiday to North America, Africa or Southeast Asia (see rules on page 364 in July issue). Send your answer *on a postcard* to Monthly Marathon, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ, to arrive *by 15th January*.

PLEASE NOTE THE RULE CHANGE (SEE ABOVE)



# ‘The Famous Grouse’ Christmas Whisky Puzzle



The following square contains the mixed-up names of a number of bird species on the West Palearctic list. Choosing your own starting place for each name, and moving horizontally or vertically, or diagonally, and forwards or backwards, from letter to letter (always going to a new letter at each move, but using letters more than once if necessary), write down the names of all the birds you can find.

D	O	W	R	G
L	I	T	A	E
B	L	T	S	H
U	E	E	A	O
R	G	N	R	C

1. How many species are in the square?
2. Which one is not on the British list?
3. What are there six of; and, in contrast, what are there two of?

The first three correct answers to questions 1, 2 and 3 drawn from entries received by 10th January 1987 will receive a prize of a bottle of *The Famous Grouse* Scotch whisky, donated by Matthew Gloag & Son Ltd.

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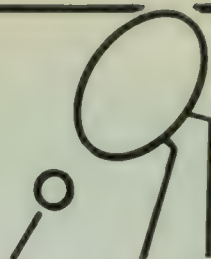
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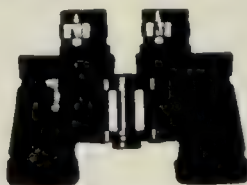
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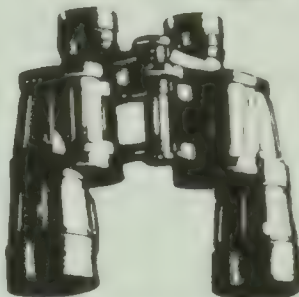
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**Front cover:** Little Owl (*Robert Gillmor*): the original drawing of this month's cover design, measuring 12.5 cm × 14 cm, is for sale in a postal auction (see page 44 in January issue for procedure)

